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French's Acting Edition. No. 61.

THE MASK AND THE FACE

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A Satire in Three Acts

BY

C. B. FERNALD

(Based on *La Maschera e il Volto*,
by Luigi Chiarelli)

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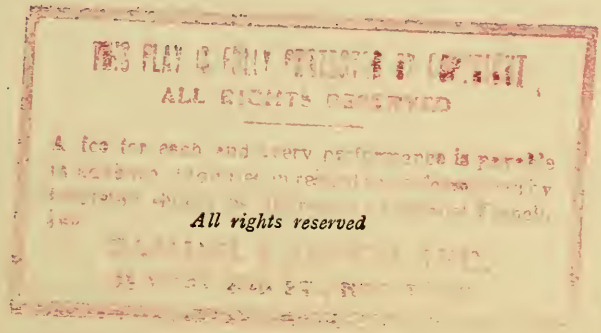

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THE MASK AND THE FACE

LONDON VERSION.

One of the most nearly perfect comedies of our time.—*Sunday Pictorial.*

In the last act a funeral takes place which is one long laugh from beginning to end.—*London Mail.*

One of the wittiest and most piquant plays to be seen anywhere.—*News of the World.*

Sheer joyous satire from first to last.—*The Sphere.*

Here is a comedy of such subtle and delicate humour that I confess I doubted if it would endure the test of a run.—*Weekly Dispatch.*

The audience enjoys it immensely.—*The Observer.*

The third act is splendidly grotesque.—*The Sketch.*

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An extremely amusing play.—*The Times.*

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Likely to give Londoners in that way a bigger treat than they have had for a long time past.—*The Observer.*

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The funniest play in London.—*The Evening Standard.*

AMERICAN VERSION.

Some of the many persons responsible for "The Mask and the Face" had marred it with awkward, old-fashioned stage-directing and a prosy and formless adaptation. So here was Mr. Faversham and his expectant audience famined in the midst of plenty.—*The New York Herald.*

Made and Printed in Great Britain by Butler & Tanner Ltd., Frome and London

THE MASK AND THE FACE

First produced at
The Everyman Theatre, London, February 5th, 1924.

CHARACTERS AND ORIGINAL CAST.

Count Mario Grazia (Aged 35)	*Franklin Dyall.*
Pier Zanotti (a Banker. Aged 66)	*Brember Wills.*
Franco Spina (a Lawyer. Aged 36)	*Edmond Breon.*
Ugo Praga (a Judge. Aged 52)	*George Merritt.*
Georges Almaire (a Sculptor. Aged 30)	*Noel Dainton.*
Luigi Bunghi (Mayor-elect. Aged 46)	*Michael Sherbrook.*
Andrea (Servant) (Aged 40)	*Ernest Haines.*
Tito (Servants) (Aged 35)	*Charles Thomas.*
Teresa (Servants) (Aged 37)	*Esmé Hubbard.*
Nina Zanotti (the wife of Pier. Aged 33)	*Dorothy Warren.*
Delia Fambri (the fiancée of Franco. Aged 28)	*Margaret Swallow.*
Wanda Borelli (the niece of Zanotti. Aged 19)	*Helen Spencer.*
Savina Grazia (the wife of Mario. Aged 30)	*Athene Seyler.*

The Scene *is a room in the house of* Count Grazia.

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THE MASK AND THE FACE

ACT I

The SCENE *is a room in the house of* COUNT GRAZIA. *Beyond wide double glass doors at the back one looks on to a terrace which affords entrances* (R.U. *and* L.U.)*; and beyond the terrace one sees the waters and opposite shores of Lake Como. Other entrances down* R. *and down* L., *and up* L. (L.2).

It is late in the evening. Moonlight on the lake. Dance music faintly audible off L.

A pretty girl in evening dress hurries on L. *pursued by a youth who overtakes her and kisses her—not to her displeasure.*

GIRL. Someone's coming!

(*Exeunt* L. *Enter* PIER ZANOTTI *and* UGO PRAGA R.U. *They have seen the kiss and are chuckling.* PIER ZANOTTI, *rather flaccid and tired, is kindly in manner, cynical in speech. He sighs as men do whose hearts are oppressed by age.* JUDGE UGO PRAGA *has aggressive eyebrows and a strong face. He is accustomed to speak with authority and has a piercing eye. He has a courtliness which awes women without attracting them.*)

PIER. My dear fellow, this house is a boiling pot. (*To* C.)

UGO. Boiling pot? (C.).

PIER (*confidentially, as they stand*). A boiling pot of intrigues and minor tragedies. I'm too old to be a part of it—I've had my day. (*Points off* L.) There's your hostess. *She*'s a fine woman.

UGO. No intrigues about *her*——?

PIER. No. Savina is devoted to her husband. (*Points off* L.) That fellow with his nose in the air—never *smiles*. His views about life belong to the eleventh century. (*Points off.*) That's Franco Spina, the lawyer.

UGO. I know Franco Spina—very adroit with a jury.

PIER. And with a woman. Making love to Savina.

UGO. But he's Count Grazia's best friend——!

PIER. Why "but" in a circle like ours?

UGO (*thoughtfully*). I suppose it's usually your best friend who makes love to your wife.

Pier. It *might* be—if he's run off with her.

Ugo (*hastily*). I mean *one's* wife.

Pier (*dryly*). I mean *my* wife.

(Delia Fambri, *full of jealous anger, shows herself for a moment on the balcony.*)

Ugo (*astounded at* Pier). Eh—— ? (*As* Delia *disappears, as if in search of someone.*) Was that your wife looking for you ?

Pier. No : not if she's looking for me.

Ugo. She seemed distressed about something.

Pier. Was there a young man with her ?

Ugo. No. (*As* Pier *goes up.*)

Pier. Not my wife. (*Looks off after* Delia.) That's Delia Fambri——

Ugo. Delia Fambri.

Pier. Engaged to Franco. Jealous of Savina. Likely to do anything a jealous woman does.

Ugo (*looking off*). Who's that she spoke to ?

Pier. Luigi Bunghi—Mayor-elect of this little township.

Ugo. I *know* him ! He used to be a waiter at a hotel in Viareggio. What is *he* doing in a house like this ?

Pier. Mario has political aspirations. (*Points off* l.) This is not a fairy—(*as enter* Wanda Borelli l., *dancing blithely to the music*) —this is my niece, Wanda Borelli.

Ugo (*bowing*). A very pleasant sight indeed.

Pier (*pointing to* Ugo). My old friend, Judge Praga. He's a magistrate—condemns people—generally to death.

Wanda. How nice. Let me come and help you, some day.

Ugo. All the murderers would be delighted.

Pier. Have you taken a scalp or two to-night, my dear ?

Wanda (*pointing off* l.). One.

Pier (*looking off*). What ? Not that artist fellow, with the golden hair and the aluminium morals ?

Wanda. Oh, no—not Georges Almaire. Mine's a collector's piece—Signor Bunghi—the Mayor-elect. I'm teaching him the ways of polite society. I'm sure he'd like to see you, Judge Praga.

Ugo. I fined him forty lire once—I'm sure he would.

Wanda. Oh, then I'll fetch him to you. Splendid !

Ugo (*as she goes*). Charming !

Wanda. Bunghi, Bunghi, Bunghi ! (*Whistles ; exit* l.)

Pier (*as* Ugo *appears to be following her with ardent eyes*). Praga, are you feeling uxorious to-night ?

Ugo (*confidentially*). Not your niece. No—something with a little more experience. (*Points off* l.)

Pier (*looking off*). Yes—a little more exuberance. (*Points off.*) That's the one you mean.

Ugo (*smiling*). Yes : in the grip of your golden-haired artist.

Pier. Yes: he's trying to dance her upstairs and downstairs and in my lady's chamber!

Ugo. What is that fellow—music?

Pier. Frozen music—he's a sculptor.

Ugo. The way he holds her doesn't suggest frozen music to *me*.

Pier. No—nor frozen mutton.

Ugo. There's an assurance in his eye.

Pier. It may be all in his eye.

Ugo. Quite—quite. You know (*digging* Pier *in the ribs*) my experience is that the man of mature years appeals more to women.

Pier (*turning to him*). Not my experience—— (*Points off.*)

Ugo. You wait, my dear fellow. (*Nudges him.*) Who is she?

Pier (*back to* Ugo, *still looking off*). My wife. (*Crosses* r. *to chair.*)

Ugo (*aghast*). Eh?——! (*As* Pier *goes to sit in the large chair,* r.) A—a—my dear old friend, if I—a—a——

Pier (*sitting*). Not at all—not at all—take a ticket.

Ugo (*again aghast*). Eh?

(*Enter* Wanda *and* Luigi Bunghi, l.u.)

Pier. Here's Bunghi.

(Wanda *clings to* Bunghi's *arm, with a twinkle in her eyes. He is a flabby individual in a badly fitting evening suit which suggests the waiter.*)

Bunghi. I—a—I was once fined forty francs in a court of so-called justice. (*He looks about, as one unaccustomed to such surroundings, yet preoccupied with his outraged virtue.*) Not only fined, but laughed at. Laughed at, by a brutal magistrate with the two halves of a moustache for eyebrows. No man with eyebrows like that——

(*He recognizes* Ugo Praga, *is about to retreat to the terrace when* Wanda *hauls him back.*)

Wanda. Judge Praga, this is Signor Bunghi, the Mayor-elect.

(Ugo *bows stiffly.*)

Bunghi (*embarrassed*). We—a—we have not met before, I *presume*——?

Ugo. You *do*.

(Bunghi *mops his brow with a large handkerchief of many colours.*)

Bunghi. Any guest of Count Grazia is welcome in this township. His friends are my friends.

(*He uses the handkerchief with both hands.* Wanda *whispers to him.*)

Wanda. It isn't a towel.

(*He throws it over his arm.*)

Bunghi (*to* Ugo). Although radical in politics, socially I feel more at home in halls like these.

Wanda. I'm sure of it. (*Whispers.*) It isn't a napkin!

(*He stuffs the napkin into his bosom; casts a doubtful look at* Ugo, *while being led off by* Wanda—L.)

(*Enter* Georges *and* Nina, *dancing*, C. *The music stops.* Nina *is a spoiled, superficial young woman, expensively dressed.* Georges *is a blasé young man with waved hair.*)

Nina (*ecstatically*). Oh, why does it ever stop——!

Pier. Nina, my friend, Judge Praga.

Nina. How do you do. Do you know Georges Almaire? He's my sculptor. (L. *of arm-chair.*)

Ugo (*disapproving of him*). How do you do.

(Georges *bows.*)

Nina. He's going to model my head. (*She notes disapproval in* Pier.) Or do you think it ought to be *re*modelled?

Ugo. I am too old a friend of your husband to understand the ways of modern sculptors.

Nina (*archly*). Nonsense. You are twenty years younger than Pier; everyone *is*!

Georges (*to* Ugo). It's quite easy to understand me. You need only remember that nothing really matters in the world except art—and possibly justice, in moderation. All the rest is merely a background—of women and commerce.

Ugo. Why drag in justice?

Georges. Out of politeness.

(*He waves and moves away;* Ugo *stares.* Ugo *sits* R.; Georges *drops* L. Delia Fambri, *with a mind obsessed, has come in from the terrace, alone;* Nina *fastens on her with an instinct to wound.*)

Nina. You do look deserted, Delia dear—where's Franco?

Delia (*defiantly*). Wherever he prefers to be. When are you going to Georges' studio, to have your head turned?

Nina. Turned? Don't you like Georges? Doesn't he look at you?

Delia. I am not for ever offering him the chance. (*To* Ugo's L.)

Nina (*abused*). I only said how deserted she looks. (*To* Georges.) She's off *her* head because Franco pays so much attention to Savina.

(*Enter* Franco Spina, L. *He is crisp and self-possessed, with a quick eye. As from a boat on the lake comes a distant male voice singing: "My Old Kentucky Home."*)

Franco. Good evening, everybody. How do you do, Judge Praga? (*To* C.) Was it you I saw on the terrace, Delia? I was across the lake, at the Selvucci's.

Delia. I wasn't looking for you. (*She turns away from him, addresses* Nina.) I was watching those two notorious Americans —the couple that eloped from Chicago ; they went drifting by in a boat.

Franco (*to* Delia). Where is Savina ?

(*Enter* Wanda, l.u.)

Delia. Go and find out for yourself.

Wanda (*looking off* l.) Savina is in a lovely gown.

Nina. Yes, Franco brought it from Paris for her, Delia dear. (*Fierce look from* Delia.)

Franco. I acted as parcel post for her dressmaker.

Pier. Wanda, what have you done with the Mayor-elect ?

Wanda. I've left him out on the terrace to dry. (*To* Nina.) Have you noticed Savina's girdle. It's sweet.

Nina. Tell Delia about it. (*Another fierce look from* Delia.)

(*The* Singer *has drifted a trifle nearer. But the song is still faint. They listen, as enter* Savina Grazia, l. *She is a fine woman with dignity and a well-balanced sense of humour.*)

Savina (*coming down* c.). That is the American. He is singing to the woman he has taken from her husband. He knows no better than to sing to her about "My Old Kentucky Home." I apologize for being so old-fashioned ; but I can't help feeling sorry for her.

Nina. But, Savina dear—they love each other. Think how happy they must be.

Savina. *She* is not singing, Nina. *She* is the one who made the sacrifice. *She* is *thinking*.

Georges (l. *of settee*). If a woman gets what she wants it does disturb her.

(Ugo *rises and gives his chair to* Delia.)

Nina. Savina, if they were not happy together they would not have run away.

Savina. If she is not happy with this man she can't turn back to the other. I think I should stick to Mario, no matter how badly he treated me.

Delia. Or you him ?

Savina. Mario ? I only laugh at him sometimes. Men never quite grow up. (l. *of arm-chair.*)

(*Enter* Count Mario Grazia. *He is a man of dignity ; but he is inclined to be pompous, irritable and fussy. He never laughs. He is self-centred and opinionated ; but he is sound at core in all essentials.*)

Wanda. They say that woman's husband was a dreadful man.

Mario. Man ? Why do you call him a man ? No, Wanda. That pair have been about the lake for three weeks. If her husband

had been a man he would have followed her to Como by now. (*Up* C.)

(*The song stops.*)

Georges. Followed her ?

Mario. And he would have killed her.

Pier (*to* Ugo, *sotto voce*). Eleventh century A.D.

Franco (*coming to* R. *of* Mario ; *to* Mario). You have said that sort of thing before, Mario ; do you mean it ?

Mario. I do not speak lightly on such matters.

(*Enter* Bunghi, L.U.)

Wanda. If Savina should elope—which she wouldn't—would you go after her and—just kill her ?

Mario. As surely as I live !

(Franco *up* R.C.)

Bunghi (*solemnly*). His painful duty.

Savina (*smiling*). Poor Mario.

Mario (*turning to* Savina). Does anyone doubt that it would be my duty, to myself and to society, to kill her ?

(*The* Singer *begins to sing "Old Black Jo" ; he appears to be much nearer.*)

Bunghi (*profoundly*). No one.

Savina (*going to* Mario). It seems a little extravagant, dear.

Georges. I call it rude.

Mario. I don't think it's a subject for jesting—with that fellow's vulgar yapping in one's ears.

(*He goes up to the terrace, irritably, and calls off* L. *to the* Singer.)

Hi ! Will you go further off, sir !

The Singer (*singing*). "I'm coming ! I'm coming ! "

Mario. Hi ! You offend my ears, sir !

The Singer (*as before*). "I'm coming ! "

Mario. Ugh !

(*He returns to the others ; the song fades out.*)

Delia. And when you had killed your wife—what should you do to the man ?

(Franco *turns away.*)

Bunghi (*anticipating* Mario). Kill him—like a dog.

Mario. I should do nothing to him.

Bunghi (*quickly*). No, no—ignore such a man.

Mario. If a husband does not look upon every man as a possible lover of his wife he shows that he neither loves her nor admires her.

Pier (*to* Ugo, *sotto voce*). Not A.D.—B.C.

Savina. But perhaps he respects her, Mario.

Mario. Savina, I respect you and admire you and love you—all three. (*Holding his face up.*)

Savina. Thank you, dear. (*Kisses him.*)

Nina. Pier, darling—if I ran off with someone, should you kill me ?

Pier (*with a shrug*). *He* might.

Georges (*walking round settee,* l. *of* Mario). The Americans are more enlightened. In the case before this the husband did follow her. The lover gave him fifty thousand dollars ; and the husband took back his wife.

Mario. Alive ?

Georges. Alive ? Of course. More than ever. (*Down to end of settee.*)

Mario. That husband was a fool.

Pier. Or a philosopher.

Mario. He was worse than a fool, sir. He made himself ridiculous, not only before the whole world, but to his wife. And when a man makes himself ridiculous to his wife she very soon ceases to love him. (*Faces* c.)

Savina (*coming to him, smiling and shaking her head*). Oh, no, my dear Mario ! (*Points off* l.2.) Aren't you going to play ? You are so *clever* at *poker.*

Mario (*testily*). Savina, I may not be clever at anything ; but I have a profound sense of justice and of personal dignity. Who will play ? I think not more than five. You, Judge Praga ? (*Crosses to* r.c.)

Ugo (*nodding*). Thanks.

Mario. Bunghi—— ? (*Goes to table* r. *and takes up box of poker chips.*)

Bunghi (*cautiously, to* Wanda). A—how much is the ante ?

Wanda (*tapping him, flirtatiously*). One little snow-white chip—one lira.

Bunghi (*pleased*). H'm. Shall *you* play ?

Wanda. It's my one vice, Signor Bunghi—(*whispers and taps him again*)—*so* far.

Bunghi (*intrigued by her manner*). I will take *ten* white chips !

Georges. Ten lire—— ?

Bunghi (*doubtfully*). A—fifteen ?

Mario (*handing box of chips to* Georges). Five hundred lire each, to start with.

Bunghi (*aghast*). Five hundred lire—— ?

Wanda. Oh, give me a thousand, Georges.

(Bunghi *is open-mouthed at her.*)

Mario. Wanda, you know you lost a good deal last night, for an infant.

(Pier *rises.*)

Wanda. Never mind. (*Points to* Pier.) I have what *he* calls an overdraft, with Uncle Pier. Lots of money in it, isn't there, Uncle Pier!

Pier (*up* L.C.). Draught? More like a gale.

Mario (*pointing off* L.2). You, Pier?

Pier. No. I see a pair of field-glasses. (*Takes them from table or desk, up* L.) I want to look into the American lady's mind. (*Levels them at* Nina, *who is smiling with* Georges.) H'm—yes. (*Exit,* L.U.)

Bunghi (*whispering to* Wanda). Five hundred lire——?

Wanda (*absorbed in* Savina's *girdle*). Such a lovely girdle, Nina. It looks like platinum.

Georges. Platinum? It would be worth fifty thousand lire.

Wanda. Oh, then, I *must* have one! (*To* Bunghi, *who is scratching his head, in dilemma.*) Come on!

Bunghi. I don't think I——

Wanda. Come on: I want your *money*! (*She drags him off* L.2. *He laughs with embarrassment. Exeunt,* L.U.)

Mario. Come along, Georges: Nina has had enough of your society.

(*Exeunt* Mario *with* Ugo, *whose arm he takes; then* Georges, *who gives a shrug to* Nina, *who waves him au revoir: all* L.2.)

Savina. Delia, may I have a word (*indicates* Franco) with your property?

Delia (*shortly*). You may have anything he chooses to give you.

(Nina *giggles at* Delia's *annoyance.*)

Nina: come out on the terrace and I'll introduce you to your husband.

(*Exit* Delia, R., *terrace;* Nina *rises.*)

Nina (*going up*). What *unpleasant* thoughts she has!

(*She starts off* L.U., *where* Pier *is; then prefers to join* Delia. *Exit* R.U. Savina *sits* R. *of table,* R.C., *alone with* Franco.)

Savina. Franco, I'm sorry I asked you to bring me some dresses from Paris.

Franco (*always self-possessed and smiling*). But why? You're delicious in this.

Savina. Delia will think it part of your neglect of her. You're making her *so* unhappy.

Franco (*near her, leaning on the table*). You flatter me, dear.

Savina (*well-possessed*). And why this affectionate manner towards *me*?

Franco. Need you ask?

Savina. Oh, my dear Franco—don't! (*Curiously.*) Why was there only one dress in the box?

Franco. I thought it suited the girdle.

Savina. But, my dear, does it matter the least what *you* thought? Why the receipted bill in the box?

Franco. There was? What fools! *I* chose the dress: because I already had the girdle.

Savina. What is this? And you paid for them—both?!

Franco (*smiling*). I felt I ought to.

Savina. My poor misguided friend——!

Franco. Such a joy to see my girdle round your waist.

Savina (*as she realizes more and more what he has done*). Franco—you are little better than an idiot.

Franco. You are only a little worse than an angel.

Savina (*not without some amusement*). Good Heaven! *You*'ve been fluttering about me for weeks—*haven*'t you!

Franco. To no purpose?

Savina (*with a shrug*). And what a very ingenious insult you've put upon me!

Franco. You look ravishing!

Savina (*turning to him, with some acerbity*). Heaven save me from sounding *vulgar*: but I should like to throw you into the lake.

Franco (*smoothly*). A woman doesn't throw a valuable animal like me into a lake. Nature would rebel.

Savina. Or would the lake?

Franco. I love you, Savina.

Savina. How depressing. (*Thoughtfully.*) I wonder what I ought to do.

Franco. Not a night but I dream of you.

Savina. What a whopper! I'll write your epitaph: "Here lies Franco Spina—*as usual.*"

Franco (*pursing his lips*). That possibly *does* sound a *little* vulgar.

Savina. Yes, but *look* at me. (*Indicates the dress.*) What *would* Mario think——! *I* think you ought to be chopped in two.

Franco. Still, a woman *always* opens the game with a *certain* amount of violence—*bordering* on vulgarity.

Savina (*annoyed with herself*). Oh, I know——!

Franco (*soothingly*). No, no, no—it's a perfectly well-recognized opening—like Queen's pawn to Queen four. You see, your violence is intended to intimidate me.

Savina. Is it? Then why doesn't it?

Franco. My dear, you wouldn't have any use for me if it did.

Savina. I have no use for you any way! Franco—do you realize that my husband is your best friend?

Franco. Rather! Through him I met you.

Savina. But what *about* my husband?

Franco. Between his wife and his best friend there can be no illusion about him.

Savina. Did you *hear* what he said to-night ?

Franco. That he would do nothing to the man who won your heart. How *thankless* it would be of me—not to accept his invitation !

Savina. But that he would kill *me.*

Franco. With one of his speeches ? (*Quite close to her.*) My *dear* Savina, you don't imagine, for one moment——

Savina (*interrupting him*). I *love* my husband.

Franco. My dear, *must* you exaggerate ?

Savina. You've tricked me into this (*the dress*) as if I accepted your effrontery. And my one thought is how to spare my husband from *sharing* my humiliation.

Franco. A perfectly correct speech from a woman of breeding—at this stage. And I admire you.

Savina. Oh, why am I even civil to you—— !

Franco. Because you might lose me.

Savina. I want to lose you, my dear friend !

Franco. And a woman of breeding knows that to lose her grace is to lose her power ; and to lose her power is to——

Savina. I will *not* lose my grace, Franco. And I *will* be firm. Now you ask me to betray my husband——

Franco (*whipping out a book and pencil*). Tuesday—— ?

Savina (*with a breath*). Aren't you wonderful—— !

Franco. At five—— ?

Savina. Oh, *how* I should love to box your ears—— !

Franco. Then you'd better come at four.

Savina (*after a look of scorn*). My dear Franco, (*not referring to the dress*) you've got me *into* this ; and you've got to get me *out* of it.

Franco (*meaning the dress and making a move to unhook it at the shoulder*). What a privilege !

Savina (*moving away*). Out of this mortifying situation. This dress and this girdle are going to be destroyed.

Franco (*wincing*). Fifty-five thousand francs ? This (*the girdle*) is solid platinum.

Savina. So is your understanding. You're to go across the lake again. Then you are to come back very quietly to the terrace (*points off* R.U.) and tap on my glass door.

Franco. Splendid !

Savina. Why ? I shall hand this harness out to you and you can jump into the lake with it.

Franco. In the dark ? Very well—if I can tell which is the lake and which is your room.

Savina. I'll leave you in no doubt about *that.*

Franco. Delightful.

Savina. I mean I detest you, Franco !

Franco. Queen's pawn to glass door.

Savina (*angrily*). *Will* you do as I *ask* ? !

Franco. I solemnly will.

Savina. Yes—only because I've interested you in the glass door.

(*Enter* Delia, r.u. *Looks at them.*)

Franco. And yet your conduct has been perfection. What husband could object to anything you've said? When I leave Selvucci's landing, in my launch, you'll see a light across the lake.

(Delia *shows that she hears this; she starts down; the others hear her, without turning;* Savina *sees her and takes up a magazine and turns the pages.*)

Savina. Well, Delia—— ?

Delia. Savina, I never knew you were so interested in carburettors (*points magazine*) and magnetoes. I thought *personal* magnetism was more in *your* line.

Savina. Franco is not. He bores me.

(*Exit* Savina, *slowly*, l.2, *turning over the pages as she goes; and watched angrily by* Delia.)

Delia (*pointing after her*). Do you think I'm blind?

Franco. Your eyes are lovely, Delia.

Delia. You're after Savina, now.

Franco. She tells me how devoted she is to Mario.

Delia. If I think she leads you on, *I'll* make her pay for it.

Franco. Absurd.

Delia. I'll bring down the roof on everybody's head!

Franco (*with a shrug*). I'm going over to the Selvucci's.

(*Enter* Pier, l.u. *He sneezes and uses his handkerchief.*)

Delia. Again—at this hour?

Franco. They play poker all night.

Delia. Why are you going there?

Franco. Some business.

Delia (*catching his arm*). Take me with you.

Franco. I can't.

Delia. Why?

Franco. Business, I tell you!

Pier. Are you forsaking Delia altogether?

Franco. I shall be back in an hour's time.

(*Exit* Franco, l. Delia *angrily watches him off.* Pier *is inclined to pace back and forth, thoughtfully.* Delia *pulls him up.*)

Delia. *You're* an old man.

Pier. Well, I knew that before any woman told me.

Delia. Then tell me this: are there *any* faithful lovers in the world?

Pier. There are.

Delia. Then what do they look like ?

Pier. They look like me.

Delia. They look like you ? (*Throwing up her hands.*) Oh, my God—— !

(*Exit* Delia, r.u. Pier *paces the room and sneezes again.*)

Pier. They can't stand the least touch of the night air. (*Turns arm-chair to face up stage; sits hidden in it.*) And they don't see half that's going on around them.

(*Enter* Nina, r.u., *followed by* Georges. *They see with satisfaction that the room—they think—is empty. They sit on settee, and at the moment when they are about to speak they observe with annoyance* Delia *enter, following them,* r.u. Delia *goes and looks off* l.u., *then goes down as if to the door* r., *but pauses thoughtfully.*)

Nina. Delia—you do walk about, don't you !

(Delia *gives* Nina *a look of annoyance. Then she discovers* Pier *reading in his chair. She divines that the others have not seen* Pier, *and she smiles.*)

Delia (*with malice*). I'll leave you—quite to yourselves.

(*Exit* Delia, r.u.)

Nina. Dear thing,—shall I come to you at three to-morrow ?

Georges. Three ?

Nina. For an early start.

(Pier *looks around.*)

Georges. What does your husband say ?

Nina. I said : " I don't suppose you mind my going to Georges at his studio to-morrow ; it's for the head only."

(*Glance between them.*)

Georges. What did *he* say ?

Nina. He said : " No. If he thinks your head is not enough, then show him your heels." (*Smiles.*)

Georges (*after a smile, suddenly becoming thoughtful*). Is your husband too good to be true ? He may be planning to explode.

Nina. He couldn't explode ! Georges—since I married Pier—I have never a single tense moment in my life.

Georges. Not even when you first saw my statue of Niobe ?

Nina (*with a shrug*). Oh—well.

Georges. But surely you don't complain. My dear, if all husbands were like yours—— (*Close to her.*)

Nina. All men would be bachelors, like you. (*She laughs and rises, as he seems about to kiss her.*) To-morrow, then—at three ?

Georges. The head only—— ?

Nina (*smiling*). The head—only.
Pier. The head only.

(*The two give a start of horror; exchange looks of extreme annoyance.* Nina *starts to hurry off* L.2, Georges *after her. But she turns and angrily motions him to go another way. Exeunt* Georges R.U., Nina L.2. *Just as* Georges *is going* Pier *clears his throat—at which* Georges *accelerates his departure galvanically.*)

(*Enter* Bunghi L.2, *wiping his brow in evident distress. He gives a furtive look behind him, then makes to steal off by the terrace.*)

Ugo (*enters* L.2). Bunghi! I say, *Bunghi*! (*As* Bunghi *tries to escape.*) Waiter!
Bunghi (*automatically*). Eh? (*Turns.*)
Ugo. You can't go away like that. You owe the bank (*points off* L.2) nine hundred lire.
Bunghi (*aghast*). Nine hun——?
Ugo. Hand it back, sir—you're not entitled to that last pot.

(Bunghi *hands him notes.*)

Bunghi. Not entitled——?
Ugo. This is a *five* card game, for *money*. *You* had *six* cards in your hand. (*Exit* L.2.)
Bunghi. *Santo Dio*—if I had twelve cards—none of them would match——!

(Bunghi, *mopping his brow in distress, goes down* R. *and beats his hand with his fist. Goes* L. *and does likewise.* Pier *observes him.*)

Pier. How much have you lost?
Bunghi. Fourteen hundred lire——! (*Beats his palm.*)
Pier. Afraid to go home to your wife?

(Bunghi *gives him a look.*)

Don't tell her till the morning. Then borrow a hundred

(Bunghi *turns to him*)

and buy her a hat.

(Bunghi *starts towards him as if to suggest a loan;* Pier *turns his back.*)

Good night. (*Sits in high-backed chair up* R.)

(*Enter* Wanda L.U. *with a pencil and pad.*)

Wanda (*as* Bunghi *is about to go*). Wait, Signor Bunghi! Your IOU. (*Offers pencil and pad.*)
Bunghi. I owe you? (*Takes paper.*)
Wanda. No, you owe Georges. It's his bank. Sign, please.

(*He signs.*) When are you coming again, Signor Bunghi? (*He waves the* IOU *at her.*)

Bunghi (*with a burst*). In nineteen hundred and fifty!

Wanda (*deprecatingly*). Oh——!

Bunghi. Hah! (*Exit with the* IOU.)

Wanda. Come back! He's gone with the IOU! (*Exit calling:*) Signor Bunghi——! Ai!

(*Enter* Savina L.2, *drawing by the hand* Mario *who comes rather unwillingly. In his free hand he carries five playing cards.*)

Mario. Yes, Savina, but you're taking me away from the game!

(*She makes him sit close to her on the settee.*)

Savina. I know; but only for a moment. (*Pointing off* L.2.) Mario (*plaintively*), I don't like any of the people who are here to-night.

(Pier, *hearing this, rises, hurt.*)

Mario (*affronted*). Don't like them?

Savina. Except dear old Pier Zanotti.

(Pier *sits down, unseen by them.*)

Savina. Mario—put your arm around me.

(Mario *encircles her with the arm of which the hand carries the cards; looks at cards.*)

Mario. A royal flush—all but the knave.

Savina. To-morrow: can't we have a quiet evening—like this?

Mario (*annoyed*). Franco's coming to dinner.

Savina. Mario: put him off.

Mario. Franco—my best friend? (*Looks at cards.*) I believe I could have drawn that knave.

Savina. I know *I* could have. (*He looks at her, bored.*) Mario,—will you do something for me?

Mario. In reason, Savina. But you seem very trying to-night.

Savina. Hold me tight. Then let me tell you what a fool you are. (*He leans away, annoyed.*) Then kiss me.

Mario (*jumping up*). Savina—it is the duty of a wife to be gracious to her husband's friends. And not to call him away from a hand like this in order to tell him he's a fool.

Savina (*rising, as he starts* L.U.). Mario——!

Mario. A man does not kiss a woman for telling him he's a fool. (*Starts away.*)

Savina. Mario! (*He stops; she goes to him ingratiatingly.*) Mario: you're *such* a man!

Mario (*elevating his eyebrows*). I do not claim to be otherwise. (*He kisses her, perfunctorily; she is not satisfied; then, testily.*) But you have spoilt the spirit of my evening.

(*He goes up and looks across the lake. She goes* R., *discovers* PIER-*shrugs to him. Looks at* MARIO'S *back. A light appears across the lake. She ponders, turning away. Enter* DELIA, R.U.)

DELIA (*to* MARIO). What's that light?

MARIO. Selvucci's.

DELIA. Savina, that's a lovely gown of Franco's.

MARIO (*turning*). Franco's? (*Comes down a little.*)

SAVINA. Franco fetched it for me, from Paris.

MARIO (*casually*). Oh.

DELIA. Such a loving touch in the girdle.

SAVINA. I hate it. (*Looks again at the light.*) I'm going to change it.

MARIO. At this hour? (*Strolls casually back to the balustrade.*)

DELIA (*as* SAVINA *starts to door* R.). Savina, take me with you. Show me your new hats.

SAVINA. I will—another time.

(DELIA *impulsively rushes to her.*)

DELIA. Savina! Is Franco—only a fool?

SAVINA. If he is, don't tell him so. (*With a shrug.*) A man doesn't kiss a woman for telling him he's a fool, does he, Pier?

(*Exit* SAVINA, R. PIER *rises.*)

PIER. No, but a fool will always kiss a woman for telling him he's a man.

MARIO (*suddenly turning*). Eh? I didn't see you come in.

PIER. No.

(DELIA *has stood silently contemplating* SAVINA'S *door. Now she turns for a look across the lake; then for another look at* SAVINA'S *door. Then she hurries out* R.U. *The light across the lake is extinguished.* PIER *has crossed to* L.)

MARIO (*having watched* DELIA *off*). What's wrong with Delia tonight? She's like a soul in torment.

(MARIO *goes around behind settee.*)

PIER. A little quarrel with Franco. (*He goes to front of settee and sits.*) When we are in love Heaven from time to time warns us of what is in store for us.

(MARIO *sits* R. *of him.*)

It's rather a cynical trick; for Heaven knows we never heed the warning.

MARIO. Nothing more cynical than you—about marriage. It's a much-maligned institution: my life with Savina proves it so. She has never known a day's unhappiness.

Pier (*with a sigh*). It's all a matter of growing reconciled.

Mario. Reconciled ?

Pier. To one's own wife.

Mario. It's a matter of understanding her.

Pier. And then of living with her.

Mario. Well, surely you understand Nina ?

Pier. Yes, I do understand Nina. So does everyone.

Mario. Everyone ?

Pier (*with a shrug*). Why should I dissimulate ?

Mario. Dissimulate ?

Pier. Shall I seem to be the only one who doesn't guess what is going on ?

Mario. Eh ? You think your wife is—— ?

Pier. I say I know. To-morrow it will be a fact.

Mario. You mean—— ? You know—and yet you—— ?

Pier. To-morrow—at three—for an early start.

Mario (*with contempt*). Ha !—" to-morrow "—magnificent !

Pier. No, I shouldn't call it that.

Mario. You know, and you intend to submit ?

Pier. Man adapts himself to circumstances—as some day you will agree, Mario.

Mario. In a case like this ? Never ! You—you simply allow your wife to betray you ?

Pier. When my age marries her age, it is the woman who is first betrayed.

Mario. She knew your age and hers.

Pier. So did I. The risk was mine.

Mario. There should be no risk. If I were any age—I were ninety—and my wife——

Pier. What could you do about it ? Write to the newspapers ?

(Mario *makes a gesture.*)

If I had terrified her with threats of violence from the beginning——

Mario. She would not be planning to deceive you now.

Pier. No—it would have only happened a little sooner than it will happen. When I married—I knew what to expect.

Mario (*rises ; goes* r.). Good God ! And you don't feel ridiculous ?

Pier. Knowing what I do about women in our little corner of self-indulgent society—and realizing how much I do *not* know—I sometimes wonder whether I am not an average man.

Mario. Then please consider me *not* an average man. (*Crosses to* c. *and turns to him.*) If I detected in my wife one tiny symptom of a thing like this—which I never shall—I would——

Pier. When the time came you would never do it.

Mario (*to* r. *of settee*). I tell you I should treat her without mercy.

Pier. Suppose I killed Nina—say to-morrow at half *past* three, for an early start, and escaped the penalty : solitary confinement for

life. With my second wife or with a mistress, my experience would repeat itself.

Mario. No: after you did justice to the first one the others would not dare.

Pier. My dear friend, there is nothing women will not dare in order to express themselves. You know very little about them. Besides, they have certain rights.

Mario. Rights? I know myself; and I know that I should kill the woman who made a fool of me.

Pier. Why?

Mario (*sits settee*). Because marriage is a pact for life. It is elementary justice that if she breaks the pact she should pay with her life.

Pier. You sound like Napoleon. But not even Napoleon knew everything that was going on around him. Nothing is sacred to women. (*Rises; goes* C.)

Mario. What vile cynicism! (*With revulsion.*) You almost make me—ugh!

(Mario *turns to* Pier.)

Pier. Because I cling to a hope that some day Nina will be disillusioned and show a little penitence towards me. That was all I had to hope for in the beginning.

Mario. And so—"to-morrow"——

Pier (*with a shrug*). At three.

Mario. You disgust me.

Pier. But if I am right? If a little charity—a little sympathy——

Mario. Good God! I can't talk to you, I—ugh!

(*As he turns away from* Pier, Delia *enters from the terrace in a state of angry agitation connected with something on the terrace in the direction of* Savina's *room. She comes to where she sees the look on* Mario's *face.* Pier *rises, moves up a little more* C.)

Delia (*abruptly*). What has he (Mario) found out?

Pier. Found out?

(Mario *sits settee.*)

Delia. Why has Savina locked herself in her room?

Pier. Savina? We haven't been talking of *his* wife. He need have no doubts about *her.*

Delia. No!

Pier. You go and soothe him, Delia. (*He sits arm-chair.*)

Delia. Yes. I'll leave no doubt in his mind. (*Goes to* Mario.) Do you still make love to your wife, Mario?

Mario. Eh? No. It isn't necessary.

Delia. Oh, wasn't that you I saw on the terrace?

Mario (*absently*). Terrace?

Delia. Making love in the dark.

Mario (*waking up a little*). Me ? Where on the terrace ?

Delia. Tapping on a glass door.

Mario. Glass door ?

Delia. Not so dark but I could see a white arm opening to let you in.

Mario (*alive*). White arm ? Whose glass door ?

Delia. Such a stealthy Romeo.

Mario. Stealthy ? *Who* tapped on *whose* glass door ?

Delia. Savina's. (*He jumps up.*)

Mario. Savina's ? Savina's ? When did you see this ?

Delia (*as if surprised that it was not he*). Oh !

Mario. I say, when did you see this ?

(*Enter* Georges r.u.)

Why don't you answer me ?

Georges. What's the matter there ?

Mario. You said you saw a man go into my wife's room.

(*Enter* Nina, Praga *and* Wanda l.2.)

Delia. I have not said such a thing.

Mario. You did say it.

(Pier *rises.*)

Nina. Delia—— !

Mario. When did you see this ? Why don't you answer me ?

Pier. She doesn't know what she's talking about.

Mario. She does know, you were out there (*points* r.u.) only just now.

(Delia *backs away towards* Savina's *door in a manner intended to be suggestive.*)

(*Points* r.) There's a man in there. By God—— !

(Mario *starts for door* r.)

Nina
Wanda } (*together*). Mario ! Mario, don't be a fool !
Pier

Mario. Damn you, let me pass.

(Delia *goes* l. *Exit* Mario r., *slamming door behind him.*)

Wanda (*sharing the general consternation*). Uncle Pier—— ! (*Going to him.*)

Nina. Georges—— ?

Ugo (*comes down to* l. *of* Pier). Pier, you know Count Grazia ; you've heard what he said this evening ?

Georges (Wanda *crosses to door* r.). Yes, but he wouldn't do it. (*Coming down* c.)

Pier (*laughing*). You mustn't take Mario too seriously.

(Wanda *opens the door* r. *and peers in.*)

Ugo. We have no right to assume he would not do it.

Wanda. He has taken something out of a drawer!

(Nina *goes up* r. Mario *is heard beating on the door of a farther room, there's a crash.*)

Pier. This won't do!

(*Exeunt the three* Men *after* Mario, r., *closing the door behind them.*)

(Delia *stands apart at* l. *in a state of tension.*)

Wanda (*up to* Nina, *half enjoying it all*). Oh, isn't it awful!

Nina. Delia, you came in from the terrace. What was it? Was it a man?

Delia. Yes.

Nina. Who?

Delia. That is Savina's affair.

(*The voices of the four* Men *are heard on the terrace.*)

Georges. Now—now——

(Delia *goes up* l.)

Ugo. Be calm—be calm——

(*Re-enter the four* Men, r.u.; Mario *is restrained by* Ugo *and* Georges.)

Mario (*struggling*). What more do you want—— ?

(*Frees himself, goes* l. Georges *extreme* l.)

Pier (r.c., *with a pistol in his hand*). You'll make us laugh at you if you go about flourishing this sort of thing. (*He shows the pistol, which he hands to* Ugo.)

Mario. Haven't you given him time enough to get away?

Pier. Mario, come to your senses. Upon my soul——! (*He laughs.*)

Mario (*sinks on to settee*). My "senses"—I know what that means—from you.

Ugo (*indicating the pistol*). *If* your honour is involved, there are other means than this. (*Hands pistol to* Georges.)

Mario. My "honour"! Good-bye, my honour!

Georges. Who talks of honour in these matters? Only Philistines.

Mario. Hold your tongue! (*Points off* r.) Are you that man's accomplice? Are you all his accomplices? *You* all knew. I was

the only one who was blind ; blind as devoted husbands always are. Blind and ridiculous ! By God—— ! (*Rises, making movement towards door* R.)

Ugo (*down* C. *in his way*). Now, now, now ! My dear sir, if you are entitled to redress, the law will give it you—all in the proper course.

Mario. The law ! I am to listen to a judge, who will tell me that an injured husband has no choice but to be laughed at for the rest of his life.

(Georges *puts pistol down on desk* L.)

Georges. Nonsense, I doubt if you are an injured husband.

Mario (*pointing to* Georges). This man laughs at me now up his sleeve. You all do. (*Points* R.) And so does that other one. He's on his way to some new adventure now ; laughing, like the rest of you.

Delia (*overcome*). Nina—take me home with you.

Mario (*crosses* R.). Go outside and laugh aloud ! (*To* Pier.) Now I understand why you spoke to me as you did : I, too, am an average husband now. It sickens me to look at you ! (*Crosses* L. *and sits settee.*)

Nina. What does he mean ?—he makes me shudder. Georges, I am coming to you to-morrow at three—with Wanda. (*Taking her by the arm.*)

(*A look to* Nina *from* Pier.)

Wanda. With me ? (*She is surprised.*)

Ugo (*pointing* R.). Look here, you'll do nothing violent, if we do go ?

Mario. How much further will you exasperate me ?

Pier (Ugo *goes up* L.). Of course he won't do anything violent.

Georges (*to* Ugo). He would not have, even if you had not seized him.

Pier. No. (*To the* Women.) Come, all of you ; good night, Mario ; sleep on it.

(*Exit* L.U. Nina 1*st* ; Delia 2*nd* ; Wanda 3*rd.*)

(Mario *turns his back on the others as they silently depart.*)

(Georges, *as he waits for the rest to go before him, stands silently laughing at* Mario—*who suddenly turns and gets a glimpse of* Georges' *face as exit* Georges. Mario *boils up with silent rage.*)

Mario (*to himself*). But why ? Why am *I* the man to suffer this !

(*Unseen by him* Savina *appears at the back, from* R.U. *She carries the dress and girdle, which she lifts clear of the balustrade, then drops into*

the lake. Then she comes down to Mario *and speaks with the anger of a woman whose husband has wrongly suspected her.*)

Savina. Mario (*she points off* R.), you ridiculous man!

(*She draws back as he jumps up in a rage.*)

Mario. *You've* come to laugh at me, too! By God——

(*He seizes her by the throat.*)

Savina. Mario——!

(*He releases her and covers his face with his hands.*)

Mario. Not with my hands! The very touch of you makes me——

Savina (*feeling her throat*). Some wives would object to being treated like that.

Mario. Ah, why did they stop me——!

Savina. Because you might have done me injury—just to save your face before the others.

Mario. Tschah——!

Savina. It wouldn't be *you* who would kill me: it would be the *other* man you want the world to think you are.

Mario. If they had *not* stopped me——

Savina. See if you can do it, now, without an audience. (*She points to desk.*) There's your revolver.

(*He starts towards the revolver; but he cannot pick it up. She has shown some fear. He sinks on to the settee.*)

Mario. You vile creature!

Savina. I am *not* vile. (*Feels her throat.*) In the circumstances, I think I am rather good-natured.

Mario. You've risked your life to dominate me. Now you'll think you can dominate me always.

Savina. Well, *somebody* ought to—if *you* can't.

Mario. I can hear them ringing up my friends in the middle of the night: to tell them what has happened here this evening.

Savina (*pointing off* R.). He pushed into my room and seized me in his arms. Well, there *was* a moment: when I didn't care if he kissed me or not——

Mario. Tschah——!

Savina. I was so stifled by your selfishness and your vanity. And he *did* kiss me.

Mario. Ah! That's enough—that's enough!

Savina. Then I hated him for it and I struck him in the face.

Mario. That's a lie.

Savina. It's the truth and the whole truth; and you can make the most of it.

Mario. You were going to betray me ; and if I hadn't—— (*He points off* R.)

Savina. Fiddlesticks ! You almost make me wish I had.

Mario. I'm like old Zanotti, now.

Savina. Don't grimace like a moving picture !

Mario. I begin to see, now, what I shall do.

Savina. You said you would kill me if I betrayed you :—your duty to " society." *Not* society : only vanity ; *not* duty : only fear. And your very fear of ridicule made you ridiculous.

Mario. Do you think so ?

Savina. And made me a little ashamed.

Mario. Did it ? For the last time, then. You are going away from here.

Savina. Going away ?

Mario (*not looking at her*). Out of this house ; out of this country.

Savina. Mario—— !

Mario. No one will know when or how or where you went. Over the frontier in my car. I shall drive it. Then, I shall know how to do the rest.

Savina. The rest ? Mario, what do you mean ?

Mario. Nobody will laugh at me to-morrow.

Savina. You make me afraid.

Mario. For your life ? No.

Savina. For you. You are planning something absurd ; to save your face with the people who were here to-night.

Mario (*cold*). Be ready to leave this house in twenty minutes.

Savina. But, Mario, you *can't* send me away like this !

Mario. Over the frontier you will take the train for Paris. Go on till you reach London. Never come nearer to me than that again.

Savina. Mario, you can't. This house is my home, my world, my everything.

Mario. You must cease to call yourself by my name.

Savina. Mario, let me have until to-morrow.

Mario. The name you dishonoured.

Savina. I did not dishonour it. Why do you not honour my confession and my candour ?

Mario. I will see that you have money.

Savina. But it's you I want.

Mario. Unless I hear that (*points* R.) *he* has joined you (*with a shrug*), whoever he is.

Savina. Mario, give me a few hours first.

Mario. I want you to be dead.

Savina. Mario, I shall be dead—without you !

Mario. Go to your room. Don't let the servants know you are there. (*Rings.*)

Savina. Mario—you *can't* get on without *me* !

Mario (*pointing* r.). Before Andrea comes!
Savina. Oh, what mischief *will* you get into, *without* me——!

(*Exit* Savina, r.)

(*He shuts the door after her.*)

(Andrea *enters* l.2, *after* Mario *has taken two steps towards* c., *and stands* l.c.)

Mario. Is there anyone up but yourself?
Andrea. No, Signor Count.
Mario (*sharply*). Bring the limousine to the front of the house.
Andrea. Yes, Signor Count. (*Turns and then back again.*)
Mario. Quickly. Then take your bicycle and ride into Como. Good night. (*Goes up* c.)
Andrea (*hesitating*). Am I to do something in Como, sir?
Mario. No. Eh? Yes—a—I have a letter for the morning train—— (*Hands him a letter from the table.*)

(Andrea *yawns.*)

Don't come back to-night: sleep at Como. (*With sudden anger.*) What are you laughing at?
Andrea. Only yawning, Signor Count.
Mario (*harshly*). Bring the limousine.

(*Exit* Andrea *quickly* l.)

Laughing at me! Like all the rest. But they shall not laugh at me to-morrow! (*Sits settee.*)

(*From the terrace enter* Franco Spina, r.u., *he keeps a keen eye on* Mario, *ready for anything.* Mario *turns to him.*)

Franco. Has everyone gone?
Mario (*jumping up*). Ah!
Franco. Eh?

(Mario *seems planning something.*)

I say, is *Delia* gone?
Mario (*rises and crosses* c.). You are the man I want.
Franco (*perturbed*). Me? Why do you want me? I was across the lake.
Mario. I want you, Franco, because——
Franco. Because what?

(Mario *looks at him calculatingly.*)

Mario (*after a moment*). Because I have killed my wife.
Franco. Killed your——? What are you saying!
Mario. My wife: she betrayed me. I killed her.
Franco. It isn't true. You are mad!

Mario. Killed her—here in this room.

Franco. When? How? Mario——?

(Mario *watches the effect as he makes up his story.*)

Mario. She was in her room—with a man. I surprised them. The others kept me from killing her then.

Franco. A man——?

Mario. Then, when I was alone with her I seized her by the throat. I can feel my nails now, cutting into her flesh. (*Going up* c.) I dragged her out against the balustrade. I pushed her back and strangled her—till she was dead and limp in my arms. Then I—— (*Down* c.)

Franco. Good God! Good God! Where is she now?

Mario. Eh? (*Looking round.*) I don't know.

Franco. Don't know!

Mario (*pointing over the lake*). I don't know where. Somewhere—far out: at the bottom of the lake.

Franco. No one saw you?

Mario. No: too dark. That is all. (*He folds his arms.*)

Franco. How calm you are!

Mario. What have I always said I should do?

Franco. And the man?

Mario. I don't know.

Franco. Nor suspect?

Mario (*shakes his head*). Nor care.

Franco (*relieved*). Oh! (*Turning* r.)

Mario. Now this is where *you* come in——

Franco (*in a funk*). Eh? (*Turns round quickly.*)

Mario. You must defend me.

Franco. In a court of law? I can't!

Mario. You can't? The closest friend I have? The man who most applauds and understands me?

Franco. But—if I failed——

Mario. Who can defend me with fervour, with conviction, if you cannot?

Franco. But I—— (*Takes out handkerchief—holds it to his face.*)

Mario. Why do you hesitate? Is it her you would defend, against me? Then why—why?

Franco (*speaks in a hollow voice through handkerchief*). No, no, no—of course, I——

Mario. You must defend my liberty: you must.

Franco (*through handkerchief*). Yes, yes, I must. But I—— (*He wonders how the case can be defended.*)

Mario (*giving him the idea*). I was a faithful husband—in every thought, as well as action. And my wife——

Franco (*with decision*). She was a shameless woman—that will be your defence.

Mario. And my life is in your hands. Franco—— ?
Franco. I accept your case.
Mario. Then, to-morrow—in Como.

(*Offers his hand as* Franco *crosses* L.)

You won't shake hands with a murderer ?
Franco (*turns to him*). Oh, yes—gladly—always ! (*Shakes hands.*)
Mario. Thank you, my dear friend.

(Franco *goes to door* L.)

Will it be Judge Praga ?
Franco. I fear it won't be. My God ! How calm you are !

(Mario *folds his arms, almost posing.*)

Mario. I have done my duty to society.
Franco. Oh, yes—— !

(*Exit* Franco, *with his hand to his chin, looking back at* Mario. *From the water at a distance again, the voice of the American :* "*Way down upon the Swanee River.*" Mario *angrily closes it out by shutting the doors to the terrace. He stands with his back to the doors as* Savina *issues from* R.)

Savina. Already Franco Spina says I'm a shameless woman ; and I have only been dead five minutes !

Curtain.

ACT II

SCENE.—*The same. Ten months later.*

It is the afternoon of a brilliant day, towards sunset. The glass doors at the back are open and one sees across the lake to the other shore with its heights and its verdure. The room contains an unaccountable number of presentation flowers with cards attached.

(ANDREA *and* TITO *are bringing in another pair of vases containing flowers.* TERESA, *faithful soul, is watching from the balustrade, looking off* L.U.)

TERESA (C., *pointing* L.U.). Andrea—Tito, he's coming!

ANDREA (R.). The Count?

TITO (*goes from* L. *to up* C. *and looks off*). Yes, Count Grazia. There's a great crowd on the pier.

ANDREA (*with a sigh, looking off*). After ten months.

TERESA. And they've acquitted him, although he killed his wife.

TITO. Yes, bless the Lord, he's free again. (*Comes down* C.)

TERESA (R.C.). They make a hero of him. All these flowers—while the Countess lies at the bottom of the lake, without a Christian burial.

TITO. Rest her soul. But if she had done her duty——

ANDREA. Yes, she would be alive to-day.

TERESA. Oh, you men are all alike;—(*going up* R., *turns to them*)—most of you do a great deal more than your duty.

TITO (*to* TERESA). Are you going to show the Count what the fisherman brought up out of the water?

ANDREA. What she calls a piece of the Countess's dress and of her girdle? Nonsense, Teresa, don't bother the Count with that. The dress was of some other colour. (*Comes* R. *a little.*)

(TITO *goes to terrace.*)

TERESA. Yes, before the water changed the colour.

TITO (*looking off* L.). He is coming.

ANDREA. After six months in the water the girdle would be covered with rust; and it is not rusted at all. Don't bother the Count with such nonsense.

TERESA. I *will* bother the Count. (*Up* R., *then turns.*) Men are such fools!

Andrea. Sh! He's coming. (*Down a little* R.)

(*Enter* Mario, L.U. *He is paler than he was; the wear and tear of his trial shows on him. The* Servants *greet him effusively.*)

Ah! Signor Count—Signor Count!

Tito. Signor Count.

Teresa. Signor Count—welcome home.

Mario (*with a sigh*). At last. Thanks, my children—many, many thanks. Ah, how good it is to be here again.

(*Hands coat and hat to* Tito, *who crosses to sofa and puts them down.*)

Ten months in prison, waiting for my trial—it seems like twenty years. And now I want to thank you, Teresa, Andrea, Tito, for all you said on my behalf at the trial.

Teresa. We told the truth, Signor Count.

Andrea. From our hearts.

Mario. And from my heart I thank you. (*Looking round.*) What are all these flowers?

(Tito *goes to stool* L., *for cards.*)

Andrea. They have been coming ever since your acquittal was announced in the first editions of this afternoon's papers.

Mario. Flowers? But why flowers? I do not want flowers.

(Tito *crosses to* L. *of* Mario *and gives him card.*)

Tito. This one is from Fedelia Farfalla, Signor Count—Fedelia Farfalla, the celebrated film actress.

Mario (*annoyed*). That notorious creature has the impudence to——?

Tito (*reading the attached card*). See, Signor Count—"From one great temperament to another."

Mario. Pah!—take it away. (Tito *gives him another card.*) "I too have killed; because he was false to me, I killed my husband. And if I ever meet *you*——" Pah!

(Tito *hands him another card.*)

"From one who languishes in solitude—Oh, strong man." "Languishes in solitude"—does she mean she is in prison?

Teresa. No, Signor Count, she *means* that she is *at liberty.*

Mario. These women are ridiculous.

(Tito *takes cards back to stool* L.)

Andrea. You don't realize how your trial has been the one topic all over Italy.

Tito (*coming* L.C.). No one has been so celebrated since Ruffino Stuzzi strangled his grandmother.

(Andrea *silently chides him.*)

Mario (*annoyed*). Why should I be made a celebrity merely for having done an elemental act of justice ?

Tito. That is what I say, sir.

Mario (*gives* Tito *a look*). My act may make men a little more careful whom they marry.

Teresa. It hasn't, sir.

Andrea. In your absence, Signor Count, *I* have married Teresa.

Mario. Teresa ? My congratulations to you both. (*Shakes hands with her, then with him.*)

Both. Thank you, Signor Count.

Tito (*coming to front of sofa*). And I am to marry Annunziata—(*look from* Mario)—she's the niece of Mayor Bunghi, Signor Count.

Mario. Excellent—— (*Shakes hands with* Tito.) A number of marriages. Are there any letters for me ? (*Turning up* C.)

Teresa. Letters—— ! (*Crosses to door* R.)

Andrea. You shall see, sir.

(Teresa *and* Andrea *hurry off* R.)

Tito (*up to* Mario, *always eager*). May I beg some of the stamps, sir ? They are from all over the world.

Mario. All over the world ?

(*Enter* Andrea *and* Teresa *with two large trays piled with letters.*)

What—all these ?

(Tito *goes behind settee.*)

Andrea. Most of them on scented paper, sir.

Teresa (*pointing out one of the letters*). That one smells the farthest, sir—on violet paper, with purple ink.

(Mario *opens and reads.*)

Mario. " If you have not been hanged when this reaches you, I have four hundred thousand dollars and an empty heart. The rest is silence." Are they all women ? (*Puts letter back on tray.*)

Andrea (*offering another*). The messenger asked if you would kindly read this before any of the others, sir.

(Mario *opens and pulls out a letter from which dangles a small key.*)

Tito (*taking a step forward*). A latch-key.

Mario (*reads*). " Mine is a vital nature such as thine.
With this small key my hidden thoughts divine ;
Then—ring up Como—four-two-nine—— ! "
These are insults to a man like me. (*Throwing letter on tray.*) Take them all away and destroy them ! (*Goes up* C.)

Tito. The newspapers would pay two thousand lire for them Signor Count.

Mario. Doubtless; therefore, burn them.

(Tito *picks overcoat and hat up and exits* L. Andrea *silently chides* Tito *as the two exeunt* R., *bearing the trays of letters.* Teresa, *who has opened a drawer in a table, now comes to* Mario *with a small piece of the frock and of the girdle worn by* Savina *on the fatal evening.*)

Teresa. Signor Count—(Mario *comes to her*)—this——

Mario (*not recognizing the exhibits*). What is this?

Teresa (*pushing it under his nose*). You don't recognize it? A piece of her girdle, and a bit of her dress.

Mario (*casually*). Oh yes, yes.

Teresa. Don't you remember it, that night?

Mario. No.

Teresa. Oh, but you will when they recover her body.

Mario. Recover her body?

Teresa. Of course you will have her body taken up and given a Christian burial, here in her own house.

Mario. Taken up? What?

Teresa. A boatman was fishing, and he caught this on his hook. He knows where the body lies.

Mario. Impossible. No one knows. No one will ever know. (*Comes down* L. *front of settee.*)

Teresa. But, Signor Count, surely you know. And surely, now that you are free, you'll have them take it up—— ?

Mario (*up to her*). Teresa, it is part of the tragedy of my wife's death that her body can *never* be taken up. (*Goes up* C.)

Teresa (*to his back*). But if the authorities say it must be taken up—— ?

Mario (*disturbed, turning*). Eh? The authorities?

Teresa. Such a Christian woman, and never a mass to be said over her; oh, Signor Count—— !

Mario. The authorities? Do *they* know of this?

Teresa. No, Signor Count. You do remember the girdle now, don't you?

Mario (*with growing annoyance*). Eh? Where does the boatman say he found this?

Teresa. He won't tell.

Mario (*pleased*). Ah.

Teresa. He says the girdle is very valuable. He wants two thousand francs before he tells where the rest of it may be lying.

Mario (*comes front of settee*). Absurd, all absurd. I don't remember what she wore that night.

Teresa. Oh, Signor Count.

Mario (*back to* Teresa). And it's impossible. Where I took her that night the lake is a thousand feet deep.

Teresa. But how could it be if the boatman caught this on his hook?

Mario. There you are—there you are; how could the boatman bring this up from a thousand feet? The Countess Grazia will lie at the bottom of the lake—as long as she lives.

(*Movement of* Teresa.)

I mean as long as anyone lives.

Teresa. With never a mass said over her—a thing the *worst* of women might be granted for her soul——!

Mario (*annoyed*). That is what every newspaper in Italy will say if you speak of this to other people. You must not mention it to anyone. (*Goes up* c. *to her.*)

Teresa. Signor Count. I have been with you for fifteen years; but I must think of my duty as a Christian.

Mario. How dare you!

(Teresa *tearfully, but firmly, marches from the room.*)

How dare you? (*Follows her, looking after her.*)

(*Enter* Andrea, *then* Nina Zanotti, l.)

Andrea. Signora Zanotti.

Mario. My dear Nina—— (*Comes* r.c. *and is taken aback by her effusiveness.*)

Nina. Oh, Mario. Oh, my dear Mario—to think that you are free at last. Kiss me!

(Mario *is not accustomed to such an attack.*)

Mario. But—I have never kissed you, Nina.

Nina. Oh, then, you wonderful man, make up for it now. (*She kisses him after waiting for him to kiss her.*) Oh, my dear—there is no one like you in the world.

Mario. How is your husband?

Nina (*bored, and moving* l. *above settee*). Oh, very well, thanks—oh, *always* very well. Did you get my flowers?

Mario. I suppose so.

Nina (*examining the labels at desk,* l.). Who are all these women? (*Coming to* Mario.) Oh, my dear! I am going to protect you from the host of forward creatures who are only too ready to pounce upon a man of character like you. (*With an admiring sigh.*) "The Man of Adamant"—— (*Slight movement to him.*)

Mario. I only did my duty.

Nina. How modest of you.

Mario. You seem so changed, Nina. What has become of Georges Almaire?

Nina. Georges? Oh, Georges. (*Crosses to settee and sits.*) A very great calamity has overtaken Georges.

Mario. Calamity?

Nina (*shrugs*). He has married Delia.

Mario. Delia Fambri? But Delia was engaged to Franco Spina. Georges has married Delia?

Nina. Yes—poor *Georges*. And Franco is likely to marry Wanda—poor *Wanda*!

Mario. Did everybody begin to marry everybody the moment my case got into the newspapers? (*Going up* c.)

Nina (*shrugs*). Everybody began to marry anybody—poor things. Of course, Georges was only a sculptor with a lot of hair: but to think that Delia should get it! Well, no one will ever print a poem about Georges, as they have about you.

Mario. About me? Poem?

Nina. A column long. (*Rises and crosses to him.*) "The Man of Adamant"—(*she pats his arm*). It's such a privilege to be alone with you, dear Mario.

Mario. "Man of Adamant"? Must I submit to this all my life?

Nina (*taking it to herself*). Mario——!

(*Enter* Tito, l.)

Tito. There are two gentlemen from the newspapers, Signor Count, who ask if you——

Mario. Tell them to go to the devil.

Tito. Yes, Signor Count.

Nina (*to* Mario). How dynamic you are!

(*Exit* Tito, l., *and enter* Andrea, l.)

Andrea (*announcing*). Madame Almaire.

(Mario *down* r.)

Nina (*annoyed*). Oh! (*Goes up* l.)

(*Enter* Delia, l., *unaware of* Nina.)

Mario. My dear Delia——

Delia. Oh, Mario! Oh, my dear Mario—(*crosses to him*)—to think that you are free! You know I've been married for six months to Georges? I must kiss you. (*She kisses him, to his surprise, then mops her eyes.*) Oh, my dear—— (*About to kiss him again.*)

Mario (*pointing to* Nina). I think you've overlooked something.

(Delia *sees* Nina; *is annoyed, crosses to below settee.*)

Delia (*to* Nina). Georges is in the garden if you want to go and talk about old shoes to him.

Nina (*coming down to* Mario). Delia is a little excitable. Georges criticizes her figure: he has the disappointed eyes of a sculptor. (*Going up* c.) I am sure you want to weep with Mario while I have a sympathetic chat with Georges. (*Throws her bag on sofa.*)

Delia (*just in time before* Nina *can get away* r.). Georges still keeps that head he modelled of you.

Nina (*pleased*). Does he ? (*Down a step.*) How sentimental !

Delia. He hangs his hat on it.

(*Exit* Nina, *annoyed*, l.u. ; Delia *goes and lays a hand on* Mario's *arm.*)

Oh, the long months of anxiety I had about you, while I was getting married to Georges !

Mario. But you always took very little notice of me, Delia.

Delia. I am a woman who does things, Mario. I confess, I thought you were a man who only said things. Now I know the truth.

Mario. No, you don't !

Delia. You are a man of steel, and I am the only woman who understands you. (*Leaning towards him, he takes no notice, she looks* l.u.) When you and Nina were alone together, did she kiss you ? (*He nods.*) I knew it ! (*Moves* l.)

Mario. And you kissed me when we were not alone together. Is it exactly necessary—all this ?

Delia. Most unnecessary. (*Up a little, then back to him.*) I am going to protect you from women like Nina.

Mario. Protect me ? That is what Nina said.

Delia. That is the sort of thing Nina *would* say. (*Moves* l. *a little.*)

Mario. But, Delia, I don't want to be protected. I don't want to be kissed. I begin to feel a little exasperated at the way people are taking me. Frankly, I want to lead the rest of my life in the society of men. Forgive me, but all this hysteria about " adamant " and " steel "—all this sort of thing—(*he waves to the flowers*)—makes me long for the peace a man can only find with men.

Delia. Why ?

Mario. Because men are more just, more impersonal and more restrained.

Delia (*after a moment*). Yes, more restrained. Perhaps that is the very reason why you'll come and have supper with me some evening—Georges is often out. I must go to him—I didn't mention I was stealing a first glimpse of you. (*Up to* c., *suddenly turns.*) I have thought of something else I can say to squash Nina. (*Starts off ; turns.*) I shall not be far, you wonderful man.

(*Exit* Delia l.u., *leaving* Mario *to stare after her.*)

Mario. The women are all mad. (*Enter* Andrea, l.) I will have nothing to do with them. (*Discovers* Andrea.)

Andrea. Judge Praga.

(*Enter* Ugo Praga, l., *crosses to* Mario.)

Mario. Judge Praga, it is good to see a man. (*Shaking hands.*)

Ugo (*with more gravity than enthusiasm*). Count Grazia, a duly constituted jury has acquitted you with every sign of approval and I congratulate you on being at peace with the law.

Mario. Peace with retirement, that is all I ask. You must dine with me, Judge Praga.

Praga. Delighted.

Andrea. Monsieur Almaire.

(*Exit* Andrea, L.)

(*Enter* Georges Almaire, L.)

Mario. Well, Georges——

Georges (*crosses* C.). My dear fellow, my heartiest *congratulations*. You *know* I've been married to Delia for six months: my *heartiest* congratulations.

(*Enter* Pier Zanotti, L., *unannounced.*)

Mario (*to* Georges). You have married an affectionate woman, Georges.

(Georges *shrugs, goes up* R.C. *and gradually gets* R.)

Pier (*crosses* C., *with a plaintive touch*). Mario, if anyone would have told me you would kill your wife, I should have said he was an idiot. But when I think of your unanimous acquittal, by twelve other idiots, I begin to lose faith in my reasoning power.

Mario. Twelve other idiots—— ? I don't know whether you congratulate me or not.

Pier (*turns away to* L.). I don't know either, Mario—but I wish you well. Nina will greet you in a moment: I mislaid her in the garden; and the Mayor will be here soon.

Mario. The Mayor ? (*Goes up a little.*)

Pier. Your old friend Bunghi, with the Town Council.

Georges (*sits* R. *of table* R.). I still have his IOU. Not a very valuable autograph. You remember that night—fourteen hundred lire ?

(Mario *sits arm-chair*; Ugo *sits settee.*)

Pier. Bunghi is only waiting for the Town Council to put on their celluloid collars. (*To* Georges.) Were you in Court this morning ?

Georges. No. Franco asked all of us who were here that night not to be present while he made his final speech to the jury. Why was that ?

(Pier *puts hat on settee and gets behind settee.*)

Mario. Because he was ashamed of the things he was going to

say about my wife. He made her out infinitely worse than she was. He should have confined his address to me and to the justice of my act.

Ugo. He couldn't; he wanted to secure your acquittal.

(*The others nod.*)

Mario. Ha—I don't owe my liberty to anything that was said by your colleague, the judge.

Ugo. The judge's charge to the jury was the same as mine would have been.

(*Enter* Tito l.u., *with another lot of flowers.*)

I am told that Franco Spina avoided the question of justice in a masterly way.

Mario. But my act *was* an act of justice. If not, then why the universal approval I receive—(*he points to the flowers*)—even at this moment?

(Tito *crosses to* r.)

Pier. Only women. (*Reads a card on flowers at* l.) "To one who dared—from one who dares." Only women.

(Tito *puts his flowers on table and exits* l.c.)

Georges. That is to say: it's only the majority which supports you—only the public; no one else. But very useful in a crisis like yours. They'd give an artist twenty years, instinctively.

Mario (*to* Ugo). If my act appeals to so many women it is because women have a sense of—a—a—justice.

Georges. Justice? Women have no time for justice. Not after the time and effort they spend upon their clothes. Execution yes, but not justice.

Pier (*coming a little* c., *above settee*). The women are grateful because you killed one of them.

Mario. You seem to ignore the moral duty I owed to myself and to society.

Ugo (*matter-of-fact*). I think we do.

(Mario *is irritated.*)

Pier (*likewise*). I think we do. But we can all see that you have gained an enormous publicity. (*Notes card on some flowers.*) Ha—Fedelia Farfalla! You could become a great film actor.

Mario. Film actor——!

Georges. You can turn your publicity value into anything you like—love, money——

Mario. I don't want love. I don't want money.

Ugo. Or into political preferment, if you chose. A man who

has so successfully defied the law as you have should triumph as a legislator.

Mario (*vexatiously*). Gentlemen, I thank you for your irony.

Ugo. Irony, Count Grazia—where is the irony? You risked your lifelong liberty for what you considered an exalted principle of conduct.

Mario. And what do you consider it?

Ugo. *I* consider it balderdash——

Mario. Balderdash?

Ugo. But what matters what *I* consider it when, instead of imprisoning you for life, they grant you the privilege of killing your own wife with impunity? What more can a man want? You risked everything; you won; the world applauds—and, away from my own convictions, I admire in you the courage of yours.

Mario. I don't like your admiration.

Pier (*coming above settee*). The extraordinary calm with which you faced it all, as if at the worst you knew there would be some way out—it did seem admirable. (*Sits* R. *of* Ugo *on settee.*)

(Mario *glares at them.*)

Mario (*rises*). My act was in defence of my dignity. I shall continue to defend my dignity. (*Crosses up* C.)

Georges. How can you, when the Mayor is coming with the Town Council?

Mario. I will not see them.

Georges. Not see them? But they are coming with the town band.

Mario (*comes down*). Town band? My God! because I killed my wife, have I got to listen to the town band?

Pier. It's about the banquet in your honour to-night.

Mario. Banquet? Nonsense!

Ugo. And about your laying the corner-stone of the new lunatic asylum to-morrow.

Mario. I won't do it. (*Sits arm-chair.*)

Pier. My dear Mario, you can't treat your celebrity in a miserly fashion like that.

Mario. Celebrity?

Georges (*to the others, going to cabinet up* R.) He doesn't seem to realize the value of this to him. Look at those flowers. In your place, as a sculptor, I should get enough commissions out of this to keep me for the rest of my life—(*picks up card, comes down a little*)—every one of them for a nude portrait in marble. (*Reads a ticket on one of the bouquets.*) "I stand before you unabashed"—there you are! (*Returns to cabinet, is going to replace card, but furtively puts it in his pocket.*)

Ugo (*to* Mario). You see, people want to assure themselves that a man like you really exists.

(Georges *sits again.*)

Pier. *I* want to assure myself of it. Something must have gone wrong with my judgment of men. I would have staked a fortune you would not kill Savina. It makes me think I ought to retire from the banking business.

Mario (*glaring*). Have you all come here to laugh at me?

Ugo. Laugh at you?

Pier. Oh no;—but your digestion is going to be ruined.

Mario. Why? (*Sitting up.*)

Pier. Lunches of curiosity, dinners of enquiry, midnight suppers of discovery—what's the use of your soul if you lose your digestion? You should have left the country.

Mario. Driven out by the antics of newspapers and women and of supposed friends? No.

Pier. Though, of course, you felt you *must* show yourself to *us*.

Mario. Why "must"?

Pier. It was in *our* honour that you slew your wife.

(*All nod agreement.*)

Mario (*rises*). In your honour? (*Down* r. *a little.*)

Ugo. That is what binds us three together.

Georges. Quite.

Pier. You thought we could not keep silent about what we saw that night.

Ugo. Had you been alone here, had you been sure that no one else would ever know what you discovered, you would not have killed your wife.

Mario. Most certainly I should have!

(Ugo *smiles.*)

It was you who prevented me from killing her.

Ugo (*quickly*). "Prevented" you?

Mario. At first. I can't understand you three; you are more perverse than the women.

Pier. I marvelled that the Judge did not *insist* that the lake be swept until they *did* find the body.

Mario. What do you mean to suggest?

Pier. Oh, I suppose you really did do it.

Mario. Are you going to accuse me of a lack of sincerity throughout? (*Up* c.)

Georges (*rises*). How possibly can a man who strangles his wife be accused of insincerity?

Ugo. I think we agree that you acted from a sincere sense of public duty.

Mario (*shrugging*). I thank you—at least. (*Comes* c.) I shall continue to do so. (*Goes up* c. *again.*)

Pier. Consistently, Mario?

Mario (*turns to him*). Of course.

Pier. Then, as a public benefactor, the only logical thing you can do is to attend the public banquet in your honour to-night——

Mario. Eh ?

Ugo. And lay the corner-stone of the lunatic asylum to-morrow.

Mario. What ?

Georges. Anything else would be damned uncivil. (*Above arm-chair.*)

Mario (*crosses down a little* r.c.). Uncivil ? I'm damned if I will lay the corner-stone of a lunatic asylum. I'm damned if I will suffer a banquet with the Town Council. I'm damned if I will listen to the town band.

(Georges *moves up* r. *and gets* c. Mario *goes up* c. *again, slowly drops* r. *just below table.*)

And I'm damned if I will be made a clown of because I did an act of elemental propriety which leaves me at entire peace with my conscience.

Ugo (*shaking his head*). No one who has been publicly pronounced a wholly blameless man ever quite regains his equanimity.

Georges. Not unless he's an artist. (*Coming down* c.) A true artist never loses his equanimity.

(*Suddenly in anger, as his hands fall upon the bag* Delia *has left :*)

What the devil is this ?

Mario (*who is walking up and down ; testily*). I don't know : you are worse than a lot of women.

Georges. This is Delia's bag.

Mario. What is that to me ? You make me yearn for the society of women.

Georges (*fuming*). Delia gave me to understand that she had not seen you yet—— ?

Mario. Well, what is that to me ?

(Delia *rushes in effusively from* l.u. *as if for the first time : and comes* c.)

Delia. Oh, Mario ! Oh, my dear Mario—to think that you are free. (*Sees* Georges.) I've come with Georges to offer you my congratulations.

Mario. Eh ? Thank you.

Georges (*handing her bag to her*). Thank you.

Delia. Oh ! They must have found it and brought it here. Thank you, dear.

(*Crosses to settee and sits :* Georges *looks at her annoyed and doubtful.*)

Andrea (*announcing*). Signorina Borelli.

(*Enter* Wanda Borelli, l. *She carries six small albums. She is very grave, her neutral eyes on* Mario : *she crosses* c. Ugo *rises.*)

Mario (*offering hand*). My dear Wanda, I am delighted to see you.

Wanda (*not taking it*). How do you do, Count Grazia.

Mario. "Count Grazia"? (*Giving a look at* Pier *on settee.*) You always called me Mario.

Wanda (*gravely*). Franco says I ought to come and congratulate you.

Mario. Your presence is very grateful to me, dear Wanda.

Wanda. Thank you, Count Grazia.

Mario. "Count Grazia"—what has your uncle been saying to you about me?

Wanda. Uncle Pier and Judge Praga both say I must look upon you just as the jury did.

Mario. But do you?

Wanda. I am trying to. I thought it might help me if I asked you a small favour.

Mario. Granted, my dear child.

Wanda. Not for myself. I have six schoolgirl friends: quite intelligent, really *quite* well bred——

Mario. Being friends of yours.

Wanda (*showing the albums*). But they want your autograph!

Mario. Autograph? Why my autograph? Why should anyone want my autograph?

Wanda. So I said: "Why have you such unwholesome wants as that?"

Mario. Unwholesome?

Wanda. "It's different with me," I said: "I knew his wife, I *have* to be civil to him."

Mario (*in despair*). I never felt so alone in my life. (*Turns and crosses* r.)

Ugo. It *is* lonely to be a great public character.

(Wanda *looks at* Pier, *then sits in arm-chair at his indication.*)

(*Enter* Andrea, l.)

Georges (*to* Mario). Look here, I must do a bust of you for the autumn exhibition.

Mario (*to* Ugo). I will not be a public character.

(*The cacophony of the Town Band suddenly assails their ears.* Mario *fumes.*)

Andrea (*announcing*). Signora Zanotti. Signor Spina.

(*Enter* Nina *and* Franco, l. Nina *merely shakes her hand to* Mario *from across room, to* Pier's *wonder: she sits sofa.* Mario *is "sniffing" the band.* Franco *crosses* c. *to* Mario.)

Mario (*to* Franco). What is that hideous racket?

Franco. The Mayor, the Council and the Town Band.

Nina. And everybody *in* the town.

Mario. Town Band? (*He goes to the door*, r.) I will *not* be a public character—not a public caricature!

(*Exit* r., *slamming the door behind him.*)

Franco (*by arm-chair*). Were any of you in Court this morning?

Ugo. For some reason you asked us to stay away.

Franco. Has anyone read the full report of my speech?

Georges. You are not going to read it to us now, are you?

(*They all suffer from the Town Band.*)

Franco. Mario disliked the things I had to say about his wife. But everybody knew I was talking for the benefit of the jury—everybody *but* the jury. Please remember that when you read the speech. (*The Band stops, he shows relief.*) Ah——

Andrea (*announcing*). His Honour Mayor Bunghi and the honourable members of the Town Council.

(*Enter* Bunghi, l., *and two to four others. They are dressed with much care and effort: men of* Bunghi's *own class. They all wear large boutonnières and are uncomfortably collared and combed.* Bunghi *wears a sash of office.* Andrea *suddenly discovers the absence of the* Count. Georges *points to the door* r. Andrea *goes and knocks several times before* Mario *comes into the centre of the room. He does not conceal his annoyance.* Andrea *exits* l.c. Bunghi *whips out a sheet of paper and has begun before* Mario *has time to stop him.*)

Bunghi (*speechifying*). Signor Count Mario Grazia—— On behalf of the township which you distinguish as one of its inhabitants, we welcome you back to liberty and fame.

(Mario *begins slowly to retreat backwards into the room*, r.)

Count Grazia, you have done a deed which will have been immortal. You have stood like—stood like—(*has to refer to his notes*)—you have stood like Horatius at the bridge, stemming the tide of loose living which threatens the fabric of our national domestic life. Sir, what was that deed? It concerned a woman—who and what was that woman?

(Mario *goes up* r. *and turns his back;* Bunghi *turns and repeats to the others:*)

Who and what was that woman? And who were her associates? It is not for me to say. I reply in the words of the distinguished advocate who—— (*He hunts in his pocket for a newspaper.* Franco *is perturbed.*)

Franco. You are not going to quote my speech?

Members of Town Council. Sh!!

Georges. Associates ? (*Looking from one to another.*)

Ugo. If there is any reference to ourselves we should like to hear it. (*Coming* c. *from above settee.*)

(Franco *shrugs, expecting trouble.* Bunghi *now has his back to the door* l.)

Bunghi (*to* Mario). —the distinguished advocate who delivered you, sir—from the sinister clutches of the law.

(*He darts a look at* Judge Praga. *Reads from the newspaper;* Franco *gives a look of alarm, then turns his back.*)

" What was this woman ? Her intimates were a group of idle rich whose personal intrigues might or might not bear examination——"

(*All* Mario's *friends are scandalized.*)

Nina. Pier——!

Bunghi. " —and who led a life of endless frivolity, probably incapable of fidelity to anything."

(*Increased scandalization :*—Mario *returns down* r.)

Signor Count Grazia, to-night in the gala-room of the Grand Hotel d'Angleterre at Como, in which I was formerly—a—associated, at a Banquet in your honour, we wish to crown you with laurels. The celebrated Signorina Fedelia Farfalla has consented to place upon your head——

(Mario *exclaims and disappears door* r., *overcome by rage. Astonishment of the* Town Council. Praga *points* Bunghi *to depart* l.)

Bunghi. But——

Ugo (*coming to* Bunghi, *tapping him on shoulder*). That is all—that is quite all.

Bunghi (*defeated*). Quite—oh, quite.

(*Exeunt* Bunghi, *who trips over the people on settee; and the* Town Council, *nonplussed. The others all look to* Franco Spina.)

Ugo. You have done us a pretty turn with your speech, sir. (*To* Franco, *who is above arm-chair.*)

Franco. I don't see where you come in : you are not an intimate of this household.

Ugo. I venture to speak on behalf of Signorina Borelli.

Franco. *I* am engaged to marry her. (*Puts arm round her shoulder.*)

Ugo. Eh ? (*He is totally floored and crosses behind* Georges *to* l.)

Georges (*to* Franco). But you are not engaged to Delia : " Life of endless frivolity "—" personal intrigues "—what about my wife ? (*Goes to her.*)

Nina (*to* Pier). And what about me ?

Pier (*to* Franco, *rising*). Exactly "Incapable of fidelity to anything"—what about *my* wife? (*She makes him sit down.*)

Delia. No wonder you did not want us in the Court. (Ugo *comes to above settee.*)

Nina. There would have been a riot if we *had* been there.

Franco. *I* was there to defend Mario's liberty——

Wanda (*rises*). And he did. (*Hand on* Franco's *arm.*) Franco has never had an intrigue with *any* woman.

(*Other women shrug as* Franco *poses in innocence.*)

It is Franco who ought to be celebrated by the town band.

Others. It is! (*In irony.*)

Wanda. And you'll find us in the rose arbour.

(*Exit* Wanda, L.C., *proudly bearing* Franco *with her; enter* Andrea, L.)

Pier. I shall—with a statement of her overdraft.

Andrea. Ladies and gentlemen, tea is served on the lawn.

Georges. Tea (*points after* Franco)—after that! They ought to serve bromide.

(*Exit* Andrea, L.)

None of this is going to help *me*, as an artist. Mario must repudiate Franco's speech. (*Beckons to* Delia.)

Pier (*rises*). In the most public manner.

(*Exit* Georges, L.U.; Delia, *with a look at* Mario's *door, tosses her bag again on settee and follows.*)

(Nina *crosses* R., *close to door* R.)

Nothing has been right in my philosophy since Mario did this deed. (Pier *joins* Ugo.) I am half convinced that I may have been wrong from the start in my attitude towards my own wife. (*With a display of some authority.*) Nina, don't stop there gazing at Mario's door like a cat at a goldfish!

Nina. Don't stand there preaching at me like a bald old parrot!

(Pier, *aghast, follows* Nina *off* L.U.)
(Ugo *exits* L.U.)

(Mario *wearily opens the door* R. Andrea *enters after* Mario *reaches table* R.)

Mario. I am not at home to any more people.

Andrea (*comes* C.). It's about the Countess's room, sir. (*Points* R.) I hope you don't mind, sir, but Teresa *will* put flowers there, fresh ones every day. You see, the Countess was the idol of all the women servants, and if Teresa insists, I can't *stop* her—now that I am *married* to her.

Mario. You may leave the flowers there. (*Crosses to settee and sits.*)

Andrea (*waiting till* Mario *is seated*). The Countess was always so fond of flowers, wasn't she, sir? She liked everything beautiful. She was sweetening to the mind, we always used to say. Excuse me talking like this, Signor Count.

Mario. I don't say you are wrong, Andrea.

Andrea. Will you have some tea here, sir?

Mario. No, I don't want anything.

(*Exit* Andrea, *terrace*, L.U. Mario *sits down disconsolately. A* Veiled Woman *appears on the terrace from* R. *and comes down* C.)

Eh? You wish to see me? (*No answer.*) Did you write me a letter—or did you send me flowers?

Savina. No, Mario.

Mario. Savina! (*Jumps up.*) Good God! Don't move. (*In a panic of fear he runs and closes all the doors, then down* R., *then* L. *and comes* L.C.) If anyone sees your face!

Savina. Not through this veil.

Mario (*goes back to* L. *of arm-chair*). Sit in this. (*She obeys.*) How dare you come here? Have you forgotten?

Savina. That I'm dead?

Mario. That I sent you away for ever?

Savina. No. I am Madame Severine de Greuze. I live in London.

Mario. With whom?

Savina (*shocked*). Really——! (*She puts back her veil.*)

Mario. You have no right to intrude upon me like this. Good Lord! How long have you been in Italy?

Savina. Only long enough to reach here in a car from over the border. Your mother always reminded me that when you were a child you nearly burnt yourself to death, playing with a box of matches—and that you are likely to do it again. And so, all during your trial I have been just across the border—in case you needed me.

Mario. I had no need of you. (*Crosses to below settee, stops, then continues his walk around back of settee to* C.)

Savina. As it happened. I read so much of your wonderful stoicism at the trial. They might have given you a life sentence. But you never flinched.

Mario (*pleased*). I think I kept my composure.

Savina. I am positive you did.

Mario. Thank you.

Savina. Knowing that a word from me would save you.

Mario. What? If I had been condemned, you would have been *vindictive* enough to—to come to life again?

Savina. Vindictive?

Mario. Vindictive enough to drown me in ridicule by having me set free the very next day. You would have done that ?

Savina. No. Mario. (*He turns away from her.*)

Mario. H'm. (*With sudden vehemence, turning to her.*) What ! ! You would *not* have ? !

Savina (*with a smile*). Oh, no—not the very next day. I should have let you enjoy your solitary confinement——

Mario (*annoyed*). Ha !

Savina. —until you were sure of two things—that you wanted your liberty—and that you wanted your wife.

Mario. Then you would have waited for ever. (*Looks at her, then goes below settee.*)

Savina (*with confidence*). I wonder——? At any rate, I shall have to take some other opportunity to win you back.

Mario (*crosses back to her,* L.). Win me back ? I have no thought in my head but how to send you off without being recognized.

Savina. And yet you don't seem quite happy without me. You don't look very pleased with all your fame and flowers. Has this day really been a triumph for you ?

Mario (*shrugs*). When a man risks twenty years' imprisonment for the sake of his principles, ought *not* his friends to show him admiration ?

Savina. Yes, Mario, I suppose they ought. Do they ?

Mario. No. (*Crosses to below settee.*)

Savina. Poor Mario. You are in rather a false position because you did not kill me.

Mario (*up to her*). Have you done something to make them suspect that you are alive and that I am an impostor ?

Savina. No, I have lain at the bottom of the lake, quite cold and still, these ten months. I have suffered solitary confinement for the sake of *your principles.* Haven't I suffered enough ? Aren't you a little glad to see me ?

Mario. No. (*Turns his back to her.*)

Savina. Then you wish me to go back to London—alone ? You are quite content to live without me ?

Mario. Perfectly.

Savina. You know, Mario, nearly all your friends were dissipated or frivolous or self-seeking or only commonplace. I was the opposite element in your life. It was I who led you up to nearly all the finer pleasures you enjoyed. Now that I am here, don't you begin to feel that something has been missing ?

Mario. No.

Savina. You are quite content ?

Mario. Quite. (*Right up to her and each looking at the other.*)

Savina. Twenty-four hours a day ? (*He shrugs ; moves away from her a little.*) Then I will go. (*She starts for the glass doors.*)

Mario (*stopping her*, c.). No: not yet! They'll know your figure: they'll recognize your walk.

Savina. Why? One wife is very like another. (*Starts up* c.)

Mario. No! Can't you imagine what will happen to me if they do detect you?

Savina. You would be ridiculous. And you are afraid to be ridiculous. I must go!

Mario (*vexatiously*). Until it's dark I will not have you go!

Savina (*pleased*). Oh—how very nice!

(*He peers out through glass doors as she is about to sit again.*)

Mario. Good Lord! What's happening on the lawn there? (*Opens a glass door up* c.) They have forsaken their tea. My Heaven! they are coming in again. (*Seizes her and rushes her down to door* r., *leaves her and goes up* c. *a little.*)

Savina. Oh! Am I to be shut up alone with my husband?

Mario. No, no, no—good God, I believe they know you are here. Go to your room. (*Returns to her and points to door* r.)

Savina (*overjoyed*). To my room? My own room?

Mario. Quick—lock yourself in, don't breathe. (*Turns to look off* l.)

Savina (*clasping her hands*). Ah, no—I won't breathe. (*At the door.*) Mario, when will you come?

Mario. Quick. (*Turns to her.*) What? How dare you ask me when I'll come?

Savina (*starting back towards him*). Mario, don't be long.

Mario (*angrily motioning her off*). I *will* be long.

(*He returns to the glass doors, opens one door to* Andrea, *who rushes in breathlessly, opening the other door.*)

Andrea. Signor Count—Signor Count!

Mario (*as one about to be exposed*). Eh? Eh? What's the matter?

Andrea. They all want to see you, sir.

Mario. Why?

Andrea. Teresa must have told them.

Mario. Teresa? Told them what?

Andrea. About the Countess.

Mario (*overcome*). About the Countess?

(*Enter* Nina, Delia, Wanda, Georges, Praga, Pier, *one after the other in various states of excitement,* l.u.; Mario *feels that his back is against the wall.*)

Nina. Oh, Mario—— (*Crosses* r.c.)

(Nina, Wanda, Delia *above settee* l.)

Delia. Oh, poor Savina——

Mario. Savina ?

Wanda. Poor, dear Savina——

Mario. Who says so ?

Pier. I suppose there's no doubt about it.

(Wanda *drops back up* r.)

Georges. It must be so. (*Crosses to above settee.*)

Ugo. It *is* so.

Mario. Then suppose it *is* so ? (*Defiantly.*) What are you going to do about it, all of you ? Are you going to laugh ? Then laugh—laugh—— !

(*They wonder at him.*)

Georges. What's the matter with you ?

(*Enter* Bunghi *and the* Town Council, l.c. Bunghi *comes down, with the recovered bit of* Savina's *dress.*)

Mario (*hating* Bunghi's *vulgarity*). And what have you to do with it ?

Bunghi. The boatman has told me where it lies. (*Points* r.c.)

Mario. Where it lies ?

Bunghi. I compelled him.

Mario. Where what lies ?

Bunghi. The body.

Mario. Body ?

Bunghi (*shows the bits of dress.*) Your wife's body.

Mario (*with immense relief*). Ah, ha ! (*With a dry laugh.*) Ha, ha, ha, ha——!

(*The others stare at him.*)

Ugo (*crosses* c.). Extraordinary ! This is no time for hysteria, Count Grazia. There are things to be done ; recovering the body, identifying it, obtaining a certificate from the Coroner, and then——

Mario. Nonsense. Ha, ha ! (*Over* r.)

Ugo (*astonished*). Nonsense ? My dear sir, you can't dismiss the law by merely saying "Nonsense."

Mario (*defiantly*). *Nonsense.*

Georges (*between* Bunghi *and* Ugo). Is that not part of the girdle she wore

(Delia *crosses* c., *looks at dress and goes* r.)

and of her dress ? Don't you recognize it ?

Mario. No.

Women (*exclaim*). Oh !

Georges. *I* recognize it.

Ugo. We *all* recognize it.

Pier (*comes down* l.). At the trial you could not remember within a mile where you went to with the boat, that night.

Bunghi. Boat?

Ugo. Where is the spot?

Bunghi (*pointing over the balustrade*). There, within twenty feet of us.

(Nina *goes up and joins* Wanda; *all stare and gasp at* Mario.)

All. Oh——!

Mario. Eh?

Ugo. Bunghi, it will be your duty to have the body recovered.

Mario (*disturbed*). Eh? Nonsense.

Ugo. But there must be an inquest: and in any case, sir—(*indignantly*)—oh——!

Mario. Nonsense.

Ugo (*shocked*). Nonsense?——!

Mario. Suppose they don't find anything?

Georges. But they will.

Ugo. They must: the facts prove they must.

Mario. Not at all.

(*The astonishment and protest of all the others increase.*)

Ugo. What? the death, the lake, the fragment of the dress, the statement of the boatman? Where does the evidence fail?

Pier. Didn't you kill your wife?

Mario. Eh? What?

Ugo. My dear sir, the law must take its course.

Bunghi. The last sad rites—then, peace at last. I will give orders. (*Starts up* c.)

Mario. No.

Ugo. No?

(Nina *goes to* Bunghi, *looks at dress and talks to him.*)

Pier. Mario, I can't understand you.

Mario. Suppose they don't find anything?

Georges. Why do you keep on saying that?

Ugo. As an officer of the law may I ask what it would mean if they did not find anything?

Mario. It would mean—(*with sudden decisiveness*)—that there *is* nothing.

Pier. Is nothing?

Mario. Because she is not there.

Pier. Not there?

All. Oh!

(Nina *crosses* l.)

Mario. Because my wife's body is at present—in this house.

All. Oh!

Georges. In this house?

Pier. In this house ?

Ugo. You have recovered it ?

Mario. I—I have recovered it.

Ugo. But how possibly, in this brief space of time——

Mario (*strongly*). That, sir, is my affair. And now I ask you to be good enough to—to spare my feelings.

Georges. Upon my soul. (*Crosses up stage* L.C.)

Wanda. Then you really grieve for her ? (*Coming down.*)

(Mario *nods, forgivingly.*)

Pier (*crosses* C.). Forgive me, Mario.

Mario. Of course, my friend.

(Nina *crosses behind* Pier *to* L. ; Mario's *dignity is impressive as they stare at him ;* Mario *crosses up to arm-chair.*)

Ugo. This is the most amazing—(*suddenly up to* Mario)—at what hour did you reach this house after your release ?

Mario. Judge Praga, I refuse to be cross-examined over—(*with a wave*)—trivial details. (*Sits arm-chair.*)

(Ugo *is annoyed.* Nina, Delia *and* Wanda *gaze at* Mario *with compassion, fixedly. They all prepare to go.*)

Pier. I think we had better go. (*Crosses* C.) You have destroyed my whole philosophy of life. You strangle your wife ; you throw her into the lake ; you are tried for murder ; and the only punishment you suffer is the town band. Then you recover her body with your own hands ; and whenever anybody else says anything, you have only to say " nonsense " and the women all gape at you in a way to fill any husband with alarm. Look at Nina ! (*Waves hat at her ; crosses below* Nina *to* L.) I am certain *I* have never known how to treat a wife. (*With sternness.*) Nina ! (*She is startled and jumps.*) *Come home !*

Nina. I won't have you use that tone to me.

(Pier *now has his face to save. He decides to be stern again.*)

Pier (*in the same tone*). Come home ! (*Then thinks it best to smile at her.*)

(Nina *haughtily passes out* L. Pier *gives a triumphant nod to the others, then exit,* L.)

Ugo (*after reflection*). My apologies, Count Grazia. (*Offers arm to* Wanda.)

Wanda (*to* Mario). I *am* sorry for you. (*Takes* Ugo's *arm.*)

(*Exeunt* Ugo *and* Wanda, L.)

Georges. Bless my soul, I believe *you're* a sort of artist in your way, Mario.

Delia. My poor, dear Mario. (*Behind his arm-chair.*) (*To* Georges.) It will be one's Christian duty to try to distract him.

Georges (*sourly*). There'll be a revival of Christianity among the women of this district. (*Vexatiously hands her her bag from settee.*) Here!

(Delia *takes bag; crosses* L.; *turns to look at* Mario; Georges *steps down and obstructs her vision; she exits* L.; *he follows.*)

(Bunghi *and the* Town Council *remain drawn up by the door* C.)

Bunghi (*sadly always*). As Mayor, I fear it is my duty to view the remains. With your permission I will ask the Council to assist me. They don't often get a painful opportunity like this.

Mario (*rises and comes down stage a little*). First, I want to see you alone—on a matter of importance.

(Bunghi *confers with the others. Exeunt,* L.U., *all but* Bunghi *and* Mario.)

Bunghi, about your IOU for fourteen hundred lire——

Bunghi (*embarrassed*). A—a—at an early date I hope——

Mario. Would six thousand lire be of any use to you?

Bunghi. Six thousand——? A—as Mayor?

Mario. No, as a perfectly honest man.

Bunghi. As an honest man I cannot—a—close my eyes. (*Suddenly.*) One moment. (*He peers cautiously outside; returns.*) Quite all right.

Mario. The—a funeral of the Countess Grazia will take place in this house to-morrow at such time as you yourself may arrange. You will attend to everything.

Bunghi. I am honoured, Count Grazia. Six *thousand*, you said?

Mario. Thousand. Between now and then I want you to secure all the necessary papers without the formality of *anyone* viewing the remains—a—except myself.

Bunghi (*pause*). I do not see why not. The trial and the verdict surely cover the matter.

Mario. In the garage you will find a wooden case resting on a pair of trestles. It may contain a life-size plaster cast of Niobe which I bought from Georges Almaire, *or* it *may* not.

Bunghi. Ah! I follow you.

Mario. Have the case brought in and suitably draped in the north room:—(*pointing to door* L.2)—then leave the rest to me and your imagination.

Bunghi. Imagination?

Mario. If my servants ask questions, be plausible. You must be a plausible man or you would not be a Mayor. (*Disliking him.*) Then, in the name of Heaven, go home, and don't come back till to-morrow.

Bunghi. Perfectly simple, Count Grazia. And the six thousand will be——

Mario. Entirely between ourselves, at any time after——

Bunghi. After the last sad moment under the cypresses. (*Deeply.*) Good afternoon, Count Grazia.

(*Goes up* C. ; *raises his hands—indicating* Mario.)

Leave him to his noble melancholia. A great soul, a hero—oh, a hero !

(*Exit* Bunghi, L.U.)

Mario. A hero ? A coward—and a fool—— !

(*Crosses to settee and sits. Enter* Savina R., *now in a house frock. Sunset is beginning.*)

Savina. Poor Mario.

(*He jumps up and feverishly closes the doors* C. *and* L.2 *and* L.)

What a lot of trouble you're having to be rid of your wife's remains.

Mario. Suppose Bunghi betrays me ? I shall be the laughing-stock of the world.

Savina. Bunghi won't betray you. He'll only live on you henceforth.

Mario. What about you ? You betrayed me, once.

Savina. I did *not* betray you, Mario.

Mario. You have only to raise your voice or show your face and —my Heaven—— ! (*Sits settee.*)

Savina (*with charming calculation in her smile*). No, Mario—no one shall know that I am dining in your room.

Mario. Dining in my room ?

Savina. Or will you feed me here, before you send me off ? I am hungry !

Mario. Here ? No. Why didn't you bring something with you ? Why didn't you buy some fruit ? You always went for hours on an apple or two.

Savina. So did you. (*A pause.*) Perhaps I did bring an apple.

Mario (*after a glance at her*). Apple—— ?

Savina (*softly, behind him*). Yes, Adam.

Mario. I don't understand you.

Savina (*with a sigh, crosses* R.). Then perhaps to-night you had better really do away with your wife.

Mario. Tush.

Savina. But don't you blame *me* for all the—the glory of this day ?

Mario. I am renowned because I killed you. I am paltry and grotesque because I did not kill you.

Savina. There are so many arguments for really doing the deed

to-night. You think *me* the cause of your troubles. Well, no one knows who came to you in a hired car to-day from over the frontier. Bunghi will see that no questions are asked to-morrow. He will believe it himself when he carries poor Niobe in, in her box. (*Points* L.2 : Mario *gives her a look.*) You will be the noble soul he says you are. Your conscience will be clear if you do away with me. And above all, Mario, you have such a splendid opportunity to commit a murder for which you have already been tried and acquitted.

Mario (*annoyed*). Ugh !

Savina. You might at least meet the law half-way ! And, oh, there's a reason of my own ! If you don't love me, Mario—*I* should be so much happier dead.

Mario (*rises*). My God ! why won't you leave me alone ? (*Around back of settee.*)

Savina. Because *I* can't bear to be alone. Mario, with everything in your favour, do you decline to do the thing the world applauds you for ?

Mario. Don't be a fool.

Savina (*with her smile, crosses down* R.). Perhaps I am not being one. (*After a moment of calculation, turns to him.*) Mario, the man who forced his way into my room for a moment—the man who has nearly wrecked my life—was Franco Spina.

Mario (*comes down* L.C.). Franco ? Franco ? No ! It isn't true—it can't be true.

Savina. That night, when you said to him " You are the man I want "—how did he behave ? Wasn't he startled ?

Mario (*convinced*). Franco—my best friend—— ! Friend ? In all my life I have never had a friend.

Savina (*up to him*). Unless perhaps your wife was one. Now that I've told you that—are you still unwilling to kill me ? You have no answer for one of my arguments. You've even got to come to me for the one answer to all of them.

Mario. What's that ?

Savina. You won't because you can't : and you can't because —you love me. (*Kneels to him at settee.*)

Mario (*enraged*). It is not true. I want you to go now. *Now.* Ha ! Franco Spina did not follow you to London : that's established.

Savina (*close to him*). Am I not attractive enough to make him follow me, if I had chosen ?

Mario (*rises*). Yes, and I want you to go.

Savina. You said I must stay till dark. (*She is clinging to his right hand.*)

Mario. I say *now.*

Savina. Although you love me ?

Mario (*loudly*). I do not love you. (*Throws her hand off.*) My Heaven, if anyone hears your voice ! (*Goes behind settee to* R.)

Savina. Oh, isn't it cowardice—to be afraid of ridicule ?

Mario. Cowardice ? I deny such a thing. (*Up* c. *a little.*) Very well, let them know you are alive. (*Movement to* c. *doors.*) I will face it ; I don't care. But I won't have you here : I won't have you in Italy. I never want to see you again. (*Down* r.)

Savina (*moved*). Mario, you are taking my soul in your hands. I'm still a young woman : I'm still flesh and blood. I shall be alone, thinking how you strangled me and drowned me and buried me : all to keep the mask on the face of your vanity. I shall be so terribly alone. And if some other man——

Mario (*up to her*). If I am ever persuaded that you are having an affair with another man—— (*Is speechless.*)

Savina. You'll cut me off without a soldo, to show that you love me. (*Crosses down* r., *then up stage.*) Remember—(*up* c.)—it's the woman who has no one to protect her who needs protection most. And if some man without fear should ask for what you throw away. God forgive me if I——

Mario (*up to her*). Stop maundering ! What I said was that I want you to stay here until well after dark.

Savina (*delighted*). Did you—dear ?

Mario. And then go.

Savina. No. No, I think I will go now. (*Makes as if to go.*)

(Mario *stops her ; he comes behind her to above settee.*)

Mario. *Will* you do as I say ? You can't go in that dress.

Savina. I know you liked the pink one better. But there is so little of the pink one.

(Mario *makes angry movement and sits on settee.*)

Oh, well—since you are so cross about it—I *will* stay—for just a little. (*Pauses, looks at him.*) Oh, you look so tired and forlorn—and friendless.

Mario. You have a gift of making me feel forlorn.

Savina. As if you wanted a long, untroubled sleep, with your arms around—a pillow.

Mario (*enraged*). I don't want a pillow in my arms.

Savina. Oh ? (*Smiling.*) Very well, dear, very well. Then to-morrow. (*Crosses* r.)

Mario. To-morrow—I mean *to-night* !—you will *go.*

Savina. Oh, I *should* have liked to stay for my funeral ! And for that great moment with your friends.

Mario. What great moment ?

Savina. When you say the big courageous thing, defying everybody : that I am alive.

Mario (*dropping to a chair, his hand to his forehead*). Ugh ! You won't be here.

Savina (*softly, near him* c.). I have been dead so long, Mario. I

know how cold it is to feel that the world has forgotten you utterly, and that there's no one warm and willing and ready to love you, whether you are right or whether you are—all wrong.

Mario (*angry with himself and fate*). Oh, my God—— !

(*He covers his face with his hands. She looks at him with a sigh of satisfaction: then she steals towards the door* R.; *opens it.*)

Savina. I'll slip on the pink one—— !

Mario (*enraged*). Slip on the pink one—— !

(*He stares at the door she closes behind her: then shows a defiance which dissolves as he remembers his troubled conscience. He rises and unlocks doors* L. *and* L.2 *with a renewed determination. Opens the doors at back, as if for air. Turns away, in new despair—as* Teresa *is heard sobbing off* L.U.)

(Mario *comes down to door* R., *when enter* Teresa *tearfully; silently she points towards the door* L.2.)

Teresa (*choking a sob*). They have taken the body in there—— !

(*She grasps* Mario's *hand, kisses it, then exit* L., *sobbing.*)

(Mario *stands, a miserable man, between his two wives: one dead, as to whom he looks off* L.2; *one living, as to whom he looks off* R. *He tries to check a gravitation towards the living one. But he fails. He is about to steal into the room,* R., *guiltily, when he abruptly closes the door as enter* Andrea *and* Tito *from the terrace,* L.U., *solemnly one behind the other. Each bears in his two hands two great candlesticks with lighted candles.* Mario *balances on one foot, then the other, undetermined what to do. Then keeps his eyes on them, as he hastily returns to guard the door* R. *and motions them off* L.2. *He watches them solemnly disappear* L.2. *As he stands looking after them,* Savina, *in a pink and very décolletée evening gown, steps a little out of the door* R., *her hands stretched towards him.*

Savina. Mario !

(Mario *suddenly discovers her behind him and in a panic jumps almost into the air—with an exclamation—pushing her off* R. *and following her, slamming the door behind him.*)

Curtain.

ACT III

SCENE.—*The same—eighteen hours later.*

The room has been transformed from yesterday. Chairs are arranged in rows which face L. ANDREA *and* TITO *in black, with black gloves and ties, stand at either side of the open door down* L. *Two or three women, in black, sit conversing in whispers, with grave faces.*

(*Enter from terrace, with a handkerchief to her eyes, first:* TERESA *in deep mourning, once or twice audibly weeping. She sits at* (4)—(*see numbering of chairs*).

Then two other women in black: they sit (11) *and* (12).

Then, in mourning garb, BUNGHI *and two or more members of the* TOWN COUNCIL. *They stop for a moment.* ONE *member produces a large coloured handkerchief which* BUNGHI *snatches from him and quickly conceals in his own frock-coat.* ONE *is a rustic and awkward fellow.* TERESA *looks up to him, her face in a grimace of weeping.* ONE *catches this grimace and is moved to a like grimace. He is motioned off by* BUNGHI. *Exunt these into the funeral chamber,* L.2.

Enter from L. DELIA *and* GEORGES.

The women all examine her mourning dress and comment on it as she and GEORGES *seat themselves, he at* (18), *she at* (13). GEORGES *is a worried man, compared to what he was before he married* DELIA. *She is healthy, but set in her expression.* GEORGES *is pale and bored; there are dark rings around his eyes.*

Enter WANDA BORELLI *and* UGO PRAGA, L.—*she on his arm, tearfully inclined.* UGO *speaks quietly to* ANDREA. *They pause for the return of* BUNGHI *and the* TOWN COUNCIL, *who range themselves in seats,* R.

BUNGHI *sits* (9), 1ST MEMBER (1), 2ND MEMBER (2).

Then exeunt WANDA *and* UGO—*he very solicitous for her,* L.2.

Enter NINA *and* PIER ZANOTTI, L.U. *She seems to want to go into the room* L.2. *But* PIER, *who has a very set look, sternly points her to a chair. Very meekly* NINA *sits in it* (7). DELIA *watches this with satisfaction which becomes a smile that is choked by a nudge from* GEORGES. PIER *sits* (6).

All the women whisper about NINA'S *clothes.* PIER *surveys* NINA *with a certain satisfaction, then sits next to her.*

Wanda *and* Ugo *return from* r., *she affecting to shed tears.* Ugo *yearns over her as he leads her down.*)

Ugo (*in a subdued voice*). Will you sit here, dear child ?

(*They sit, he* (16), *she* (15). *For a moment there is a dead silence, during which a Town Council man yawns, which causes two other people to yawn who have seen him.* Georges *consults his watch and settles down to be bored.*)

Delia (*bending to* Georges). "Dear child" ? (*He glances at* Wanda.) What did that mean ? Has she dropped Franco ?

Georges. Her uncle made her drop him. And now she's going to shorten Ugo's life.

Delia. Horrid of you, at a moment like this.

(*Another moment of silence.* Georges *consults his watch.* Nina *and* Pier *are waxen images.* Wanda *deserts* Ugo ; *goes tearfully to* (17).

Wanda (*whispers*). Do I look all right ?

Delia (*with only a glance at* Wanda). I don't know how *I* look. Mario was in a shameful hurry to have this over.

(Georges *nudges her.*)

(*To* Georges.) You're in an awful temper ! (*To* Wanda.) *I* was up *all night* :—(*shows her dress*)—with the dye bucket.

(Ugo *looks at his watch.* Georges *goes and sits behind him* (15), *the two whisper together, detached from the others in the room.*)

Georges. How could he recover the body in such a short time ?

Ugo (*shrugs*). I don't know.

Georges. I don't believe he did recover it.

Ugo (*without respect for* Georges' *intelligence*). You think he would deceive his friends and the public and the law to an extent like this ?

(Georges *motions for* Ugo *to subdue his voice.*)

To sign a false identification of a body, found anywhere, is a penal offence.

Georges. Not unless one gets found out. *He* is *not* getting found out. (Georges *raises his voice and* Ugo *hushes him.*)

Ugo. Absurd. If he were guilty of what you suggest—(Georges *turns away*)—then on *this* occasion he would be brought before *me.*

Georges (*turning back*). There you are, *quite* simple :—you are his friend——

Ugo. I am, I would give him twelve months' penal servitude.

Georges. Eh ? You would ?

Ugo. Just as I would you.

Georges. H'm! H'm!

(*A moment of silence.* Pier *looks at his watch.* Georges *yawns, looks at the door* R. Wanda *crosses to sit at* (8).)

Georges (*to* Ugo). They say he—(*pointing* R.)—has been locked, in his room for twenty-four hours. Why? (*Rises.*) Has he got the habit of being locked up?

Ugo. He probably had a sleepless night.

Wanda. He is thinking about the past.

Georges (*shrugs*). Seems to have forgotten about the present. (*Crosses to* (18).)

Delia (*nudges* Georges). Do try to look more genial.

Georges (*whispering to her*). The dye is coming off on your neck. (*Sits.*)

(Delia *gasps in horror.*)

(*Enter* Franco Spina, *now the picture of a man in the throes of remorse, most mournful and downcast. He stops down at* (15)—*his thought is "if they should ever find out!"* Ugo *gives him a hostile look.* Wanda *moves to* (5) *as if to avoid* Spina. Spina *sits* (15), *head in hand.*

Enter Mario, R., *in a light tweed suit with brilliant tie and light blue socks, a cigarette in his mouth. He suddenly realizes with great embarrassment that this is a funeral; remembers the cigarette and throws it away.* Pier, *then* Ugo, *then* Georges *go to him and silently shake his hand.* Mario's *hand and arm are lifeless to their grasp.* Bunghi *comes as if to go between* Mario *and the door* R. Mario *convulsively makes for the door. As* Bunghi *is seeking to grasp his hand* Mario *becomes aware of* Savina, *veiled in her deep mourning, entering with mincing steps* R.U. Mario *is overcome with anger and trepidation.* Savina, *with a pause up* C. *for a mischievous look through her veil at* Mario, *then minces off* L.2, *watched by* Mario *aghast and by all others except* Spina.)

Delia (*to* Georges). Who is that woman?

Georges. How do I know?

Wanda (*who has studied* Savina's *dress*). She didn't put *that* together in a single night.

Ugo. She carries herself well; like the late Countess.

(Mario *discovers* Spina; *glares at him.* Spina *recoils, then overcome with* Mario's *look, exit* Spina L.U. *like a hunted man.*)

(Savina *re-enters: comes down* L. *to* C. Mario *stops her.*)

Mario (*holding her and whispering*). How dare you!

Savina (*whispering—the triumphant wife, full of the humour of the situation*). In the circumstances, who could resist! (*Then seriously, she points off* L.2.) The candle-grease is ruining our rug.

Mario. Do you want to ruin me ?

Savina. By paying my respects to your late wife ? You might at least put on black for her—after last night.

(*She points off* r., *and we know she is laughing behind her veil.*)

Mario. If you don't go to your room, I may burst a blood-vessel.

(*Others crane to overhear.*)

Savina (*to his ear, lifting his trouser leg to show his sock*). Your socks are much too joyful.

Mario. Ugh !

Savina (*whispers*). Try to look as if you had had a bad night ! (*She laughs again.*)

(*She starts as if to go into the room* r. *He rushes after her.*)

Mario. Ahem ! This way, madam.

(*He accompanies her up to the terrace whispering to her in a rage. Unseen by others he shoves her off* r.u. ; *then goes to the balustrade.*)

Delia (*to* Georges). Did you get any of that ?

Georges. She says his socks will give her a bad night.

Ugo (*to* Wanda). There are a lot of people here who never knew the Grazias. Vulgar curiosity.

Wanda. That must have been one of them.

(Mario *comes* c., *after a look at his socks, which are pale blue ; since all are looking at his socks, he rushes off* r.)

How deathlike Mario looks.

Delia. It's his conscience.

Georges. No, it's his clothes.

Wanda. Perhaps he will waste away and die. (*To* Ugo.) Do widowers ever do that ?

Georges (*sotto voce to her*). No—only husbands.

Delia. Poor Georges didn't have any breakfast and it's past lunch-time.

Georges (*pointing after* Mario). They have passed him in three meals since we were here yesterday. They say he ate enough for two giants—especially at breakfast this morning. H'm !

(Bunghi *comes doubtfully to the door* r. ; *consults his silver watch. Then decides to knock on the door. After* Bunghi's *second knock* Ugo *crosses* c. *and speaks to* Georges. *Exit* Bunghi, r.)

Ugo. We must get Grazia to repudiate what Franco said in his speech to the jury.

Georges. Then we must ask Franco how much we owe him for maligning us.

Wanda. Shall we have to pay for the dreadful things Signor Spina said about us ?

Ugo (*crosses* c.). Yes, but not in money. In reputation. When a man's character is on trial *he* may escape, but his friends never do.

Wanda. Is that just ?

Georges. No, it's justice.

(Ugo *crosses and stands above* Wanda.)

(Bunghi *returns; goes up* c.*; clears his throat.*)

Bunghi (*addressing the company*). Ahem ! there will be motor-cars to the—a—scene of *interrment* for those who have not—a—those who have come on foot. My friend Count Grazia has spared no expense. I hope there will be room for all.

(*Signals to* Councillors, *they rise, also the two women in black, and exeunt one by one* l.u. Bunghi *motions to* Andrea *to go to room* l. Tito *takes his place.*)

My friend, Grazia, asks if some of you will pass to the room beyond the funereal chamber, and there, perhaps, help him to receive some of those who continue to arrive. He says he was unaware he knew so many people ; and his feelings have overcome him.

Wanda (*rises.* Ugo *comes down* l. *of her. Again with her handkerchief out*). It's such a comfort to have you with me, Judge Praga.

Ugo. Count on me, dear child. (*She takes his arm, exeunt* l.)

(Georges *rises; to* Bunghi *up* c. Delia *rises.*)

Bunghi (*to* Georges). A sad day—a sad day.

Georges. How long before the cortège moves off ?

Bunghi (*whispering, pointing off* r.). He can't find a pair of black socks.

Georges (*irritated, coming down to* Delia). This is a very badly managed affair.

(Delia *chides him, saying "Georges !"*)

Why didn't he buy himself a pair of black socks ten months ago ?

Delia (*remonstrating*). Georges——

Georges. Keeping us waiting for a pair of black socks.

(Delia *shrugs and exit* l. *He follows her.*)

He strangles his wife and then he goes fiddling about to find a footling pair of black socks.

(*Exit* Georges l. Bunghi *motions to* Tito *who exits down* l. Bunghi *alone remains, except* Pier *and* Nina. *He would like them to depart also; but they are staring before them motionless.*)

Bunghi. Ahem. (*But as they make no sign, exit* Bunghi *with a shrug,* l.u.)

(Pier *rises and struts to* c., *his eyes fastened with a certain satisfaction on* Nina, *who sits motionless, staring at the wall.* Pier *thinks highly of himself, as if he had conquered her.* Nina *turns an enquiring look at him, then rises; goes down* l.)

Pier (*puffing himself up*). Sit down! (*She sits down at* (16), *then seems about to rebel and rise.*) Sit down!

Nina (*collapsing plaintively*). How *can* you be so brutal——!

Pier. Eh? (*Coming to her and darting a finger at her.*) What did I tell you?

Nina. You said you'd strangle *me*—and throw *my* body into the lake.

Pier (*strutting*). H'm.

Nina (*turning to him*). You can't mean such a thing!

Pier (*through his teeth*). So they said of Mario.

Nina. You might be imprisoned for life.

Pier. Was Mario imprisoned for life? Ha! *Mario* will go down to history. *I* may go *with him.* Why not? (*She shudders.*) Why not? ?

(*Enter* Mario *now in black, but still with bright socks,* r. Nina *has collapsed;* Pier *shows his satisfaction still more at the sight of* Mario.)

Pier (*going to* Mario, *grandly*). You were right, my dear Mario, you were right. What women cannot bear is emotional stagnation.

Mario (*looking back to where his wife is*). A—yes.

Pier. They must have the storm before they can enjoy the calm. Look at Nina, now—(*pointing to her*)—a perfect marvel of docility.

Mario (*puzzled*). Docility—Nina——?

Pier. *And* devotion.

Mario. Eh? To whom?

Pier. Damme, to *me.* I owe it all, dear friend, to following your example.

Mario. *My* example. *You* have not killed your wife.

Pier. Not yet—*not yet*!

(Nina *looks frightened.*)

There's still the question of how to cope with the admiration I shall receive from the other women—at *my* age. (*With a fierce glance at* Nina.) Nevertheless, by Gad—— (*Going towards* Nina.)

Mario (*aghast to* Nina). *Does* this man threaten you with following my example? (*No answer, as* Pier *checks her.*) *Does* he?

(Nina *looks at* Mario, *then at* Pier.)

Pier (*grandly*). You may answer, my dear.

Nina (*to* Mario *in a small voice*). Yes.

Mario. How revolting!

Pier. What ?

Mario. How disgusting !

Pier (*coming down to him*). To follow your example ? Do you begin to repudiate the act which made you famous ? Or do you think you are the only man, by Gad, sir, who——

Mario. Tosh !

Pier. Tosh ? (*Puffing up.*) Nina ! !

Nina (*small-voiced*). Yes, dear.

Pier. Rise. (*She obeys.*) Nina ! !

Nina. Yes, dear.

Pier. My arm !

Nina. Yes, dear. (*She takes it meekly.*)

Pier. We will show our perfect harmony by walking——

(*She starts to walk ; he checks her.*)

Ah !—in a direction chosen by me.

(*He indicates* L. ; *they walk* L., *in step ; he stops.*)

Some one, my dear Mario, has a slightly swollen head.

Nina. Yes, dear.

(Pier *gives her a look ; exeunt* L. Mario *sits, at* (15). *Enter* Savina, R. *She is looking bright and refreshed in her mourning frock. Something rather tranquil is on her mind.*)

Savina (*thoughtfully*). Mario——

Mario (*leaping up, first up* C., *then down* L.). Take care. (*He hurries about anxiously locking doors.*) I seem to do nothing but gallop about and close these doors. (*He sits again* (15).)

Savina. You are looking much better. (*Looking at his socks.*)

Mario (*irritably*). I am not feeling better.

Savina (*brings chair* (17) *to* C. *and sits*). But you had a beautiful sleep, you never stirred all night. I have been thinking. We must have a programme ; we must look the situation in the face and then we must carry out our programme.

Mario. We ?

Savina. We have a great deal to accomplish before we can ever live at peace with the world again. Oh—how is my funeral getting on ?

Mario (*with a sigh*). I don't know.

Savina. But—isn't anything happening ?

Mario (*waving his arms*). Oh, I don't know ! (*She smiles.*)

Savina. Well, I shouldn't think it would be a very great success with neither of us there. I am so eager to get on and reconstruct our life together——

Mario. Do you imagine I am going on with you the way we used to ?

Savina (*with a nod* L. *and a little smile*). If you don't intend to, you have rather compromised me, you know.

Mario (*rising*). I am going to make a generalization about women—the things that a woman will take for granted, simply because at a moment of weakness a man——

Savina. Mario, you can't generalize about women!—you haven't enough history with them. And oh, that is why I like you so much. You are all mine.

Mario. I am *not* all yours. (*Sits.*) Don't make that mistake.

Savina. You know, you've got yourself into a very difficult position. (*Look from him.*) Not with me—with the world; it threatens your whole career. Now, there are three things you must do——

Mario. Are you going to tell me what I must do?

Savina. Yes, dear. First, you must tell me that you love me, and that we are to go on as we used to.

Mario. Do you think——?

Savina. Wait, dear. The second thing is that you must call all your friends together and tell them that I am alive.

Mario. Nonsense! Do you think they'd believe me?

Savina. Well, after that, they won't believe you *again* very soon. And the third thing is that you must fight your friends and the whole world to a standstill with the one weapon that never deserts anyone—the truth, until you have won back their respect for both of us.

Mario. And I won't do any one of your three things.

Savina. What did you say yesterday? "Very well, let them know you are alive—I will face them, I don't care." That was so courageous of you.

Mario. And then what did I say? That I would not have you here, and that you must go.

Savina (*with a smile of pleased recollection*). And then you sent me off to my room. Then I heard you getting into bed in your room. I could not imagine why—until I heard you order your dinner brought to you there—a very big dinner.

Mario. I had to feed *you*. To do that I *had* to order the dinner brought to my room. And since Andrea would have thought me mad to eat my dinner sitting in my bedroom, I had to undress and go to bed!

Savina. And then you locked me in with you, and very sweetly let me have *my* dinner—in the far corner. That was a breathless adventure. I didn't make a sound, did I? I *was* good, wasn't I?

Mario (*resentfully*). You kept on making plans inside your head.

Savina (*amused*). Did I? You ate hardly anything; you looked so wan and miserable. You must have stared at me in that helpless way for over an hour.

Mario (*turning away*). If we had spoken we might have been overheard.

Savina. And I knew you wanted to be comforted.

Mario. I did *not* want to be comforted. I had no headache; you invented a headache for me.

Savina. But after I invented it, didn't you rather enjoy it?

(Savina *has but one thought in the world—this man. She makes us believe that he must have enjoyed his experience.*)

Mario. Your one idea was to make me forget that as soon as it was quite dark I was going to send you away.

Savina. We both forgot that, didn't we?

Mario. We didn't *forget* that we had forgotten it.

Savina. But you rather liked my taking your headache away. (*Rises; goes to him.*) I kept thinking how it must have been in the days before men had speech; we two hidden in our cave and only able to express ourselves by gestures. (*She passes her hand lightly over his head; he turns away.*)

Mario. I hated you for your *mancraft.*

Savina. "Mancraft"! What a nice new word.

Mario. It's a devilish old craft. You knew I had been ten months in prison, awaiting my trial.

Savina. Poor Mario!

Mario. You knew I was disgusted with the silly antics of the world and my friends. You knew I was tired and distressed and locked in with you. You made the best of it!

Savina. Did I? Considering all you have done to me, do you think I took a very harsh revenge, when I sat next you? (*She does so now, but she does not touch him.*) And took your head on my shoulder? If you think so—why did you weep salt tears?

Mario. How you love to dwell on every little detail of it!

Savina. That is my life; my whole life. Hours must have passed in that silence we had together—some of the happiest of all my hours.

Mario. Happy? When you found your way to my arms I wanted to kill you. To touch you brought up every savage, cruel instinct that slumbers in a man. Because I wondered what other "little details" I was stirring in you: memories of that other man.

(*She quickly moves away from him.*)

Savina. Oh! That is a beast of your own construction—out of your stupid vanity—out of every paltry thing in your nature. You nurse it to justify yourself for the wrong you have done *me.* But in your heart you know it's a beast without reality, and that is why you sobbed in my arms.

Mario. No, it was out of my humiliation, because you conquered me.

Savina. It was your love for me that conquered you.

Mario. No.

Savina. You had wronged me, and, without knowing it, you

turned to me for comfort, because I was the only one who could forgive you.

Mario. You women are all alike—you only covet a man for the purpose of unmaking him. And when you *have* unmade him how you must despise him.

Savina. Although I stick to him and defend him, even—even while he is making such a mess of my—(*she points off towards the funeral*)—my last afternoon reception. Mario——

Mario (*he jumps up*). I don't want you to stick to me.

Savina. Mario—— ?

Mario (*savagely*). I want you to go away from me.

(*She is alarmed.*)

Savina. Mario, think—think, if that were true.

Mario. It is true.

Savina. After last night ? Think, if I were really lying dead in the other room and you went about this house, recalling the sound of my voice and the touch of my hand—remembering that I was the only one you knew who loved you enough to tell you the truth in all things—even if it risked my happiness for life. (*With a sob in her voice.*) Mario——

Mario (*moved*). I did *not* say I wanted you dead.

Savina. Mario, who was ever more willing, more submissive, more responsive than I have been to you ? Who is more eager to make a word or a wish or a look of yours the order of her day ? Mario——

Mario (*unwilling to show that he is moved*). I don't wish to be harsh with you——

Savina (*going* R. *a little and pulling at her handkerchief*). If I don't think you love me I shall be as good as dead. I have no reason for my life but you, no occupation but to comfort you and be your love.

Mario. Savina—— (*Starts and crosses to her.*)

Savina. Mario, I can't understand anything else—— (*She sobs.*)

Mario (*approaching her*). Savina.

Savina (*breaking down*). I couldn't bear it, I couldn't bear it——

Mario. No, no, no. Savina—(*he takes her in his arms*)—Savina, it isn't true that I don't love you. I do—I do——

Savina. Oh——

Mario. No, no. Come, we won't think any more about the past—only about the future. Savina, my darling——

Savina (*choking her sobs*). The future—together—— ?

Mario. Of course together—together as we used to be.

(*She puts her arms around him; he kisses her; she moves away to dry her eyes. He gives a sigh—this has not solved his position*

towards the world. She blows her nose; resumes the same practical mood in which she began this interview. Savina *sits chair* (17) r.c. Mario *crosses* r.)

Savina (*nasally*). Well, that was the first thig od the prograbbe.

Mario (*with a start*). Eh ?

Savina. And now you must do the other two.

(*He suppresses what might have been a temper.*)

Mario (*coming to her* r.c. *firmly*). Savina, if I love you it is because I cannot help it. I—I mean—I wouldn't alter that if I could. But other things are for my discretion.

Savina. Yes, dear. Now the second thing on my programme —(*he turns to her*)—I mean *your* programme——

Mario. To call them all in and tell them you are alive ?

Savina. But if you love me, how can you conceal that I'm alive ? That is what made you so miserable last night till I took your thoughts away from it.

Mario. To call them in here and after yesterday—after all the events of these ten months, suddenly to tell them that I am—what I am. My God——! (*Sits* (15).)

Savina. Poor Mario, even in your sleep I think you heard the Town Band.

Mario. I've got to appear naked before the world. I can hear its laughter like a frozen wind. I shall have no more dignity than a clown.

Savina. Mario, what kind of man is it who can't take a little punishment for telling the truth ?

Mario. It won't be punishment, it will be destruction. I shall have no career, I shall have no face.

Savina. Don't be afraid of the world, if you have plenty of love and truth in your heart. (*She rises and crosses* l.)

Mario. I shall be the classic instance of my kind !

Savina (*crosses to him*). Call them in and *tell* them, Mario ! The longer you shiver on the bank, the colder you'll be in the water.

Mario. How can I live it through ! You won't laugh at me, Savina ? (*Taking her hand.*)

Savina (*with her smile*). Oh, my dear,—(*kisses his hand*)—I shall try not to !

Mario. It's the women's tongues I fear the most.

Savina. Delia ?—and Nina ? Did they make love to you ?

Mario. I suppose so.

Savina. I suppose they kissed you ?

Mario. Eh ? Yes.

(Savina *descends from the throne of justice to be a woman.*)

Savina (*transformed*). They did ? Then please get on with

your speech to the *men*, because *I* shall have something to say to the *women*. They'll soon learn whether I'm alive or not!

Mario. I ought not to have told you this.

Savina. Every man should tell his wife when other women kiss him. And not wait twenty-four hours, if you please. (*Going* r.)

Mario. Good lord, a minute ago you were so high-minded and serene, and now——

Savina (*coming* c.). That was before you told me these creatures kissed you. *They'd* kiss *anything*. (*Lifts chair and lets it drop, with temper. Up stage and stands at glass doors, back to him.*)

Mario (*with a shrug*). You don't know what it is to be the most celebrated murderer of your day.

Savina. I can imagine it. *You* only killed *one* woman. Will you get on with this, Mario? Don't sit there as if you were pleased with these harpies, instead of being disgusted. (*Crosses up* l.)

Mario. Give me a little breathing spell first.

(*She is well to* l.2. *Her ear catches something that makes her listen at the door,* l.2. *She unlocks it and opens it an inch. Then a smile dawns on her face.*)

Savina. Good Heaven, did you tell them to go on with the service? (*Crosses down a little.*)

Mario. Oh, I don't know what I told them. (*Sits with his face in his hands.*)

Savina (*at door* l.2). Now isn't that nice of the dear Monsignore! That benign old man is saying such nice things about me; I must send him some flowers.

Mario. And when he gets them what will he say about me? I have had the law upon me, now I shall have the Church. How is the Church to tolerate me when it learns that I never killed anyone in my life?

Savina (*recurring to the previous question*). Never mind the men; you go and call in these women. (*Coming down to* l. *of* Mario.)

Mario. After I have had a little air,—(*rises, crosses* c.)—go in there—(r.)—till I——

Savina (*crossing to door* r.). I shall not wait long. What did those two say to you—"Poor Mario—with no one to look after you"—didn't they?

Mario (*angrily*). What are the mere kisses of two women to the fact that I must go and stamp myself the greatest fool ever made? You almost make me laugh——

Savina. Oh, my dear—if only I could!

(*Exit* Savina r., *leaving door open. He unlocks the doors at the back. Then bracing himself to it, he goes out on the terrace. But he cannot bring himself to go in the direction where his friends are, off* l.u. *He*

disappears R.U. *Enter* FRANCO, L., *followed by* ANDREA. FRANCO *has something heavily on his mind.*)

FRANCO. Tell him I have something I *must* say to him.
ANDREA. Yes, sir.
FRANCO. It—it is a confession I want to make.
ANDREA. I'll find him, sir. (*Exit* ANDREA R.U.)

(FRANCO *crosses to door as if to find* MARIO. *He gives a terrific start at the sight of* SAVINA, *off* R.)

FRANCO. Eh ?

(*He is taken with the fright of a man who sees what he cannot believe. His hat drops from his hand. His feet cling to the floor, he utters an inarticulate sound. His hand points to her, off* R. *He claps his hand to his eyes, then looks again. Retreats scrambling among the chairs.* ANDREA *re-enters,* R.U., *and stands in amazement as exit* FRANCO, *terrace* L.U., *a shaken man. Re-enter* MARIO, R.U., *gesticulating in an imaginary scene in which he produces* SAVINA *alive and defies the scorn of the world.* MARIO *starts guiltily on discovering* ANDREA.)

ANDREA. Signor Count, the service is over, the procession will start at a word from you. (MARIO *sits* (17); *stares at him.*) Shall I speak to Signor Bunghi ?
MARIO. Eh ? No.

(ANDREA *wonders at* MARIO'S *inertia.*)

ANDREA. Or Signor Zanotti ? (*No answer.*) Or Judge Praga ?
MARIO. No. Leave me alone !

(ANDREA *goes* L.U., *turns to look at* MARIO, *then exits.* MARIO *is obsessed with the dread of the scene he has to go through. Enter* WANDA *and* UGO PRAGA, L.U.)

WANDA (*to* MARIO). I have been unkind to you. Unkindness never does any good to anyone. I am sorry.
MARIO (*absently*). Thank you, Wanda. (*Half rises.*)
UGO (*down* L.C.). Outside, waiting to pay silent homage to you, there are about three thousand people. This will be a momentous day in your career.
MARIO. It *will* be ! (*Sits* (17).)

(*Enter* BUNGHI, L.U., *importantly.*)

WANDA. And there are scores of Civil Guards to keep order, and the Town Band——
MARIO. With their instruments ?
BUNGHI. Dear Grazia, shall I ask them to play to the spectators —something suitably depressing—— ?
MARIO. No !

Bunghi (*trimming, as usual*). No—no, a melancholy silence. I will try to restrain the band.

(Ugo *motions* Bunghi *off, and sits* (15). *Exit* Bunghi, l.u. Delia *and* Georges *enter* l.u.)

Delia (*comes to chair* (12) *for cushion and makes for* Mario). You poor dear, you do look so uncomfortable.

Georges (r. *of* Mario, *taking the cushion from her*). Don't agitate him with cushions. This will be his first appearance before a large audience.

(*Puts cushion back.* Wanda *sits at* (8). Nina *and* Pier *enter* l.u.)

Delia (*to* Mario). They are waiting for you, you know.

(Nina *goes* l.)

Georges (*goes* r., *grimly*). And some of us who had no breakfast have had no lunch.

(Delia *sits* (18).)

Mario (*absently*). Eh? No thanks, I don't want anything to eat.

Nina. But, after it is all over, Mario—if you care to come to us this evening and——

Pier (c., *sternly*). Nina!

Nina (*meekly*). Yes, dear. (*He points to a chair.*) Yes, dear.

(*She sits* (16), Georges *points the others to* Mario. *They regard his abstraction with wonder.*)

Pier (*after a moment, to* Mario, *going up* l. *a little*). There will be some delay.

Mario. Yes. (*With an effort.*) Are you all here?

Georges (*standing down* r.). We are. And since there *is* some delay, I suggest we take up the matter of Franco Spina's scurrilous attack on us in yesterday's speech to the jury. With every respect for your inner feelings and—(*testily*)—with *some* respect for my *own*——

Delia (*chiding him for his manner*). Georges——

Georges. I have mentioned that I have had no food. (*Up* r.)

Ugo (*to* Mario). And if you will pardon me, I think some immediate action is called for.

Georges (*to* Ugo *with a smile*). You mean a sandwich? (*Comes down a little.*)

Ugo. I mean action with regard to Spina's speech.

Georges (*down to* Mario, *exasperated*). Excuse me, are you listening to what he says?

Mario. Eh? (*His eyes stray to the door which hides* Savina.)

Georges. Judge Praga is not in your bedroom.

Mario (*bracing himself for his effort*). Are you all here ?

Georges. *We* are all here, but *you* don't seem to be. (*Goes* R.)

Ugo. It lies in your power, as a national hero, to make a statement that will reverberate throughout the country.

Mario. I know it does——

Ugo (*showing a letter*). Therefore we suggest that you sign this communication to the Press repudiating Franco Spina's defamation of your friends.

Wanda (*admiring him*). Splendid.

Georges (*to* Mario). And then, your signature.

(*He takes the letter to* Mario, *who but stares at it. The others nod their approval.*)

(Georges *has found a fountain pen; he hands it to* Mario.)

Georges. Sign here. (*He points to the paper.*)

Mario. No.

Nina (*hurt*). Mario—— !

Mario. I can't.

Ugo (*astonished*). You can't ?

(Wanda *talks to* Nina.)

Mario. No, no—I can't.

Georges (*brutally*). What's the matter with him ? (*Going up stage a little.*)

Delia. Georges——

Georges. I say what's the matter with him ? He refuses to go to his wife's funeral, he refuses to give a decent character to his friends, and he sits there as if he had just seen his face in the looking-glass. (*Down* R.)

Pier (*down* L.). No—no—Georges, a little kindliness, a little sense of the occasion that brings us here.

Nina. Pier, dear——

Pier. Silence, Nina.

Nina. Mario isn't himself.

Pier (*testily, putting his face down to her ear*). How *can* a man be himself till his wife's funeral is over ?

(Nina *turns to glare at him; he turns away.*)

Ugo (*to* Mario). Your refusal to defend these ladies, especially if I may say so, Signorina Borelli——

Mario (*with an effort*). But if I told you something—if I told you that for ten months Savina has been perhaps—not—not quite—a—dead—— ? (*He stops, overcome by their stare of wonder if he is in his right mind.*)

Georges. Eh ? (*A step forward.*)

(*The others exchange glances in silence.*)

Nina. I told you he isn't himself.

Mario (*with another effort*). If I said that I have never been myself, that nothing has ever been itself, that not only is Savina not —not—but that all the time she has been not—not—a——

Georges (*down* r.). *You*'re not—not! (*To the others.*) He's dithering.

Pier (*with sympathy*). Do pull yourself together, Mario.

Ugo (*likewise*). Keep a grip on reality, Count Grazia. Your wife—(*points* l.2)—is about to be laid to rest——

Mario. No.

(*All the others receive his denials with a shocked amazement that increases.*)

Delia. No?

Ugo. What?

Wanda (*shaking her head*). Oh, Mario!

Ugo. You say she is not?

Mario. No, she is not.

Georges (*testily, pointing off* l.u.). Then I am one of three thousand people who want to know *why* she is not!

Pier (*deprecatingly*). Georges——

Georges. No, this is the only way to talk to them when they begin like that. (*Crosses to* Mario.) Look here, you are going to bury your wife——

Mario. No.

Georges. I say you *are*. (*Points* l.2.) She is lying there——

Mario. No.

Pier (*astounded*). You say she is not lying there?

Mario. No, she is not.

Georges. Then if she is not lying there—what *is* lying there?

Mario. Nothing.

(Georges *turns away in disgust.*)

Delia. Nothing?

Mario. Nothing of importance.

Georges. Nothing of importance. (*Coming down again* r. *of* Mario.)

Mario. Your statue of Niobe.

Georges (*outraged*). What!—my Niobe?—you—you are holding a funeral over my Niobe? You are going to bury my masterpiece?

Mario (*defiantly*). Why not?

Georges (*with a squeak*). My Niobe! (*Going up* r. *a little, sinks on chair.*)

(Ugo Praga *begins to dominate.*)

Ugo (*rises; goes* c.). No, no, no—control your mind, Count Grazia. Recall the facts. Yesterday you recovered your wife's body from the lake. To-day——

Mario. No.

Ugo. No?

Mario (*rises*). This funeral must be stopped.

Ugo. Funeral must be stopped? Is this thing possible? (*As the others stare in silence.*) He seems lucid——

Mario. I am lucid. And I am struggling to—to——

Ugo. You say your wife does not lie there? (*Points* L.2.) You say you did not recover her body from the lake? You say this funeral must be stopped?

Mario. This funeral must not go on because I——

Ugo (*coming down a little, sharply, like the judge on the bench*). One moment, sir, pause before you commit yourself.

Pier (*to* Ugo). I don't believe him.

Ugo. Count Grazia—from your pinnacle as the apostle of a new moral code, *do* you realize what you are saying?

Mario. I do, and I tell you——

Ugo. Wait! Your are saying that you have descended to a depth of imposture—(*with indignation*)—beyond which no man can go.

Mario. Beyond which no man can go! (*He sinks into his chair.*)

Ugo. You say you have substituted——

Georges (*with a quick turn about to* Mario). My Niobe!

Ugo. For your wife. (*Up* C. Wanda *joins him.*)

Pier. An act of buffoonery.

Mario (*stung*). Buffoonery?

Pier (*shaking his head*). But—but after your heroic act of ten months ago, after your magnificent demeanour while you faced imprisonment for life—— I don't believe what you say.

Mario. I confirm it, and what is more——

Ugo (*down to* Mario, *stabbing at him with a forefinger*). No! As a lawyer and as your friend, I charge you not to tell me more. We must not know any more. In fact, when a man has touched bottom as you have, there can be no more.

Mario. But, Judge Praga——

Ugo (*as before*). No. Forgive my insistence. (*To the others.*) My dear sirs, one thing is paramount, this funeral must go on.

Mario. Must go on?

Others. Yes, yes.

Ugo. My dear sir, if the public knew it was being hoaxed like this, you would be wellnigh ruined.

Pier. Do you realize your present eminence in the eyes of the people? You have had a marked effect upon their moral principles—possibly even on their moral practices. This funeral must go on.

Mario (*with a gulp*). How shall I live this through? (*Sits.*)

Georges (*up to him*). What are they selling, outside?—Picture-postcards of this villa, with your portrait in the corner. Oh no—this funeral must go on. (*Turns and goes* R.)

Mario. But I want to tell you all the truth.

Ugo. We don't want to *know* what you really did with your wife's body.

Wanda. He's quite mad. (*Comes* L. *of* Ugo.)

Ugo. He can't afford to be mad. (*To* Mario.) Your political career won't permit it—not until you are in office. If this function were interrupted now, do you know what the next suspicion about you might be in the public mind ?

Mario. Suspicion ?

Ugo. I don't want to sound fantastic, but I can conceive a most offensive, a most horrible suspicion—one that would destroy you, sir.

Mario (*rises, suspecting*). Eh ? You think it would ?

Pier (*to* Ugo). I follow you—I follow you. (*To* Mario.) If they started a story like that, you would be shrivelled by the derision you would meet.

Delia (*to* Georges). What story ?

Georges (*divining*). True—the body has never been recovered.

Ugo. Because it was never there.

Mario. And if it never was—— ?

Pier. People would say that the body was never there——

Ugo. Because you had never *killed* your wife !

All Women. Oh !

Delia (*jumping up*). We can't possibly have people saying *that* !

Mario. A—a—what would my position be *if* I had never killed Savina—— ?

Georges (*scathingly*). "If you never killed Savina "—— ?

Ugo (*aghast at the thought*). What ? You might as well die where you stand.

Mario. Eh ?

Georges. You might as well evaporate. (*Goes up stage.*)

Nina. You *would* evaporate.

Pier. Annihilation !

(Mario *drops into chair again.*)

Ugo. But that is fantastic. This funeral must go on.

Mario. You—you think—— ?

Others. Of course, of course.

Mario (*rises*). You—you think it would be more reasonable towards you all if I simply let the——? (*Points off* L.U.)

Others. Of course—of course !

(Mario *begins to be very anxious about the door* R. *and the woman beyond it. He approaches it.*)

Mario. And—a—just leave it at that ? If I thought Savina would agree—I mean——

GEORGES (*vexatiously*). You strangled Savina, ten months ago.

MARIO (*crossing to door* R.). I know—I know. But *her* views in a matter like this——

GEORGES. Speak up! She *has* no views.

MARIO. I know—I know—it's all quite reasonable, and perhaps if you will all go home I will give it some thought. And in the meantime I bid you all good——

(*Enter* SAVINA, R.U. *to* C., *in a smart frock of warm colour.* MARIO *finishes his speech not with "afternoon" but with:*)

—God!

(*Because over their shoulders he has seen* SAVINA. *The others turn and discover her. Discomfiture of* MARIO. *Loud amazement of the others.*)

WOMEN } (*together*). { Oh!
MEN } { Savina!

SAVINA. Some of you will soon assimilate the fact that I'm alive. (*She withers* DELIA *and* NINA.)

(SAVINA *is at* C. MARIO *remains down* R.)

MARIO (*defying everybody*). Assimilate this:—That I love my wife. (*Crossing to take her in his arms.*) I accused her, strangled her, buried her—and brought her back to life:—because I loved her.

NINA. Oh, that I could be loved like that!

DELIA. God forbid that *I* should be!

PIER (*with sudden angry realization, crossing to* MARIO). Yes,—but you didn't do it!

NINA (*likewise jumping up*). No. (*To* PIER *with scorn.*) And *you* wouldn't do it, you old fraud. (*He turns to her; she points him sternly to his chair.*) Sit down!!

(PIER *collapses into his chair.*)

MARIO (*likewise chiding* PIER). And cultivate a certain restraint with your wife.

SAVINA. Oh——!

CURTAIN.

PROPERTY PLOT

ACT I

Parquet stage cloth.
Carpet square, C.
Small rugs at doors R. and L.
Long corridor rug outside terrace.
Settee.
Desk.
Small table.
Arm-chair.
Small chair.
Cabinet.
Standard lamp.
One small lamp.
Table.
Italian motor magazine (on settee).
Liquor glass } On table R.C.
Glass bowl }
Small book }
Writing materials } On writing-desk.
Inkstand }
Coloured quill pen }
Letter for MARIO }
Field-glasses }
Ornament } On cabinet.
Box of Poker chips }
Ash-tray }
Vase of coloured poppy heads } On small table L.
Box of cigars }
Box of matches }
Cigar-cutter }
Ash-tray }

Note.—The table and chairs shown on the terrace are not essential.

OFF R.

Door smash.
Double dress for SAVINA to throw over balustrade.
Loaded revolver (not to be fired).

PERSONAL PROPS

Cigar for PIER.
Cigarettes for PRAGA, GEORGES, FRANCO, NINA, MARIO.
Cards and pencil for GEORGES for IOU.
Large handkerchief for BUNGHI.

ACT II

Large vases of flowers on cabinet (3).
Large vases of flowers on desk (4).
Large vases of flowers on small table.
3 large baskets of flowers. Dressing the stage with same.
Piece of dress same colour as SAVINA's first act dress that she throws into lake, only discoloured by water. In the top drawer of cabinet.
Numerous cards (visiting) on the cabinet and desk.

OFF L.

Two vases of flowers for TITO to bring on. Both bearing cards from the donor.
Four large candlesticks alight.
Deep-black-bordered handkerchief for TERESA.
Big brass drum and stick } for Town Band.
Brass-horned gramophone with march record }
Address and Italian paper for BUNGHI.
Bag for DELIA.

ACT III

18 chairs for mourners and 1 stool.
Cabinet and desk remain on—strike all else.

4

1	2	3	5	6
11	10	9	8	7
12	13	14	15	16
18		17		

Place chairs as numbered.
Black-bordered handkerchiefs for every one, and black gloves.

LIGHTING PLOT

ACT I

FLOATS and NOT Batten. *White* half up. *Ambers* full up.

Spot amber from batten on to arm-chair R.C.
Spot amber from batten on to settee.
Batten and half-watts "Italian blue" on to back-cloth.
Amber lamp in standard lamp R.
Amber lamp in small table lamp on desk.
Amber lengths off doors R. and L.

ACTS II AND III

Full up white and ambers.
Strong white lights on back-cloth.
N.B.—White spot behind back-cloth for the Selvucci's light.

MUSIC PLOT

ACT I

At the rise of the curtain. Cabinet gramophone is playing off L. up-to-date "Fox Trot"—just audible.
Stops at cue: PRAGA—"The criminals would be delighted."
At cue: starts again at exit of WANDA calling "Bunghi, Bunghi, Bunghi——"
Stops at cue: from GEORGES—"Modern sculptors——"

ACT II

Town Band at cue: from GEORGES—"I will not be a public character."
Stops at cue: from FRANCO—"For the benefit of the jury."

Continued from second page of cover.

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